

THE GIRLHOOD SERIES.

SIX VOLUMES. ILLUSTRATED.

AN AMERICAN GIRL ABROAD	ADELINE F. TRAFTON.
THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER SOPHIE MAY.
ONLY GIRLS VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.
SALLY WILLIAMS EDNA D. CHENEY.
LOTTIE EAMES.	
RHODA THORNTON'S GIRLHOOD	. MARY E. PRATT.

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THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER. Page 9.

THE
DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER.

BY

SOPHIE MAY,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE PRUDY STORIES," "DOTTY DIMPLE
STORIES," ETC.

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THE
DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

“ My child is yet a stranger in the world.
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“ MARIAN ! ”
No answer.

The sun had refused himself to everybody for the day, and persisted in being “not at home,” till at the very last moment he peeped out, with a relenting smile, which might pass for a good night and a blessing.

A certain face, at a west chamber window, would not receive the tardy benediction, but its eyes, covered with a little plump hand, looked straight down into the bottomless gulf of an old portfolio.

“ Plenty here, but nothing finished. ‘The Woman in the Moon.’ Lovely, as far as she goes. ‘Ode to a Dying Dove.’ Something the matter with its feet. Wish I could send an article to the ‘Aurora.’ As

Judith says, it would be so exciting to hear it read before a house full of people, not one of them dreaming 'twas you!

"Here are some old compositions. 'Improvement of Time.' I wrote that for Miss Lightbody. 'Twas like drawing a tooth."

"Marian!"

"'The Four Seasons.' So stale! Call 'em *five*, for variety."

"Mary Anne!"

"Dear, dear! How I hate my name, with a little indefinite article tucked on to the end of it! Yes, Pauline,"—going to the head of the stairs; "what do you want?"

"Don't strain your eyes, child."

"O, is that all? I'm not reading, Pauline. I'll be down presently."

The little girl tripped back to her room, wafting the spicy odor of a late clove pink, which nodded at the neck of her dress. But her train of thought had been disturbed, and, like a butterfly shaken from one flower, she flew to another.

"There's the blank book mamma gave me. I must begin it this very night," said she, dropping the muslin curtain, and lighting her lamp, though the room was flooded with soft twilight.

"You will scarcely use the book, child," she says. What a piece of fickleness she takes me to be! But, mother dearest, you don't know your own child. I'm going to write a sort of history of my life, and keep it under lock and key. I never will consent to have a word of it published while I live; but perhaps it will

be revised and corrected after I'm gone. At any rate, it will be a great comfort to my friends."

Marian's willowy figure bent forward over the book in her lap, and the lamp, with a tipsy shade like a slouched hat, shone down on a blank book with the name, "Marian Prescott," and below it the line,

"Think that To-day shall never dawn again."

"Those words are sort of awful, I declare. Only things seem different coming from mother—sweet and tender, somehow, like her voice. Just see how lightly she bears on, as if she were afraid of hurting the paper's feelings!"

Now, I'm going to give my journal a name.

Miss Tottenham.

There, it is written. Why didn't I say Madame Looking-glass?

Sept. 3. I am a girl of thirteen. I have a large nose—

I declare, I didn't think it would be so hard to know what to say. What's the use to describe myself?

My father is superintendent of the Sabbath school, and very much respected in this village. He is also a physician. His nose is rather sharp; but no one need say mother holds it to the grindstone; for she is sweetness itself. She has not been well for a long while. My sister Pauline is five years older than I. She has a meek look round the mouth. People say her face is like a Madonna.

(I don't see how they know; there are so many Madonnas.)

She has too low a forehead.

(There, I don't want to go on and say she's not intellectual. Still, when you speak of a person's having a low forehead, what can you expect?)

I have an older brother, Keller,—he means well, but is *very* rattle-brained,—between Pauline and me. Then a child of four; his name is Benjie.

(The tea bell. Pauline, you were the means of that blot! Anybody'd think I was deaf by the way she rings.)

And Marian hurried down stairs, leaving her pretty chamber to hold a sort of "witches' Sabbath,"—hair-brush and Bible turning their backs on one another, red apple and amber globe of soap lying cheek to cheek, flowers with wet stems trailing over an open volume of poetry, and the flaring lamp crying, mutely, "Put me out, put me out, before I crack my chimney."

"My patience, if here isn't Miss O'Neil!" thought Marian, her quick feet slackening from the time of a waltzing tune to the slowest Old Hundred.

"How do you do, Miriam?"

"Nicely, thank you; but my name isn't 'Miriam,'" returned the little girl, with an involuntary tilt of the chin.

"What has the cross old thing got against me now?" thought she, seating herself at table opposite the slender-witted spinster, and gazing rather defiantly at her sallow-white cap, with trembling bows of heart-broken lilac.

There was an acidity about Miss O'Neil, as if she had been well steeped in the vinegar of crushed hopes; al-

beit she could sometimes flatter so sweetly that you would think she had just drawn herself, all sticky and dripping, out of a pot of honey.

That she and Marian were natural enemies might be seen at a glance. Very young people could hardly be expected to have much toleration for such a singular person as Miss O'Neil. In manners a lady, in mind a child, in "Irish wit" a second Mrs. Partington, she was a bugbear to the Quinnebasset children, who were required to treat her with respect, though they considered her very little removed from a fool.

She knew how to eat an egg; was holding one now in her napkin with infinite grace, little end up, and dipping out its contents with a tea-spoon. She was fond of eggs, and often asked for them when she dropped in anywhere to drink a social tea. And why shouldn't she ask for what she wanted? Wasn't she a lineal descendant of the O'Neils of Ireland, who might have sat on a throne, but for some reason didn't? Wasn't she the last fruit on the ancestral tree, the others of her family having dropped off early, like summer windfalls? And now wasn't it the duty of the Quinnebasset people to take care of her?

Especially as she had once attended boarding-school, and after that had lost her property, and kept a milliner's shop in Machias, and of late an A B C school at Quinnebasset.

To say nothing of her urgent claim to everybody's respect on account of always wearing mitts when she went visiting.

"Miriam," said Miss O'Neil, "they say, if there's any mischief, *you* are always in front of the rear. But

when you went to my school, you used to learn behavior."

"What's coming now?" thought Marian, with a side glance at her father, who appeared to be only half listening.

"But you've forgotten all the behavior you ever knew. I've heard with my own lips how you've been conducting, Miriam Linscott. When I lived at Machias, the young ladies that went to the Select School would as soon have thought of breaking the laws of the Swedes and Persians as associating with boys."

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Prescott; "what have the boys done, that they can't be spoken to?"

"I shouldn't think that of you, Dr. Linscott, a man that sends his daughter to the Female Academy," exclaimed Miss O'Neil, flourishing her tea-spoon.

"I don't send her; it's her mother's work. I prefer a mixed school, as all sensible people must," returned the doctor, with a mischievous smile.

"In-deed!" ejaculated Miss O'Neil, smoothing down her apron with both hands, as if she were mesmerizing herself—a habit of hers when highly excited. "Indeed, Dr. Linscott! What would they have thought of you at Machias, if you'd spoken so there?"

The doctor felt no interest whatever in his standing with a dead and gone generation, and passed his tea-cup to his daughter Pauline without answering.

"If you knew, sir, how your little Miriam has been conducting, you wouldn't speak so lightly of boys," continued the lady, with an angry quaver of voice. "She has been—riding—a—calf!"

Dr. Prescott set down his tea-cup suddenly. A

burning flush spread over Marian's face and neck, so deep that the clove-pink was lost in it.

"Why, Marian!" said Pauline, with motherly solicitude; "this cannot be true."

"Answer your sister," said Dr. Prescott, sternly.

"Yes, Miriam, tell your father just how you've been conducting, and see then what he thinks about boys."

"It hasn't the least thing to do with boys, Miss O'Neil," said Marian, taking out her handkerchief in great agitation; "and so anybody would know, except people that mix up things in their heads! Why, father! why, Pauline! to think you should listen to such a story for a minute! Do you suppose I'm a Hottentot? Why, I wouldn't ride a calf if you'd give me a gold saddle! So unladylike! Just think!"

"Then what are you blushing for!" said Keller, bluntly. "You didn't ride him; but I'll warrant I know who did!"

"Why, where were you? Did you look? Did you see?" exclaimed Marian, eagerly; then covered her face in confusion at the laugh which followed.

"There! what did I tell you?" said Miss O'Neil, triumphantly.

"Keller just said that to catch me. You didn't see, Keller, and you don't know who the girl was, now."

"No, but I shall soon find out," thought Keller, adding aloud, "Sounds like Judith Willard. Father orders her to take exercise, and I'm sure such a ride must be invigorating."

"Judith Willard! A perfect lady like Judith!

What an idea! When all the exercise she takes is her French exercise—that's what Robert says, and it's pretty nearly true. Judith Willard! Why, when that calf came into the yard, she begged Nao—she begged the girl to stop!"

Pauline gave Marian a warning touch with her slipper, under the table; but Marian was going off in an uncontrollable fit of laughter, and did not observe it.

"Such a figure! That calf! Why, he was so frightened he tried to go over the moon. He just jumped and frisked, and away went his feet, flying out as stiff as boot-jacks! And there was Naomi, jouncing up and down—"

"So 'twas Naomi Giddings," said Keller, quietly. "I supposed so."

"What did I say? What *did* I say?" exclaimed Marian, her voice choked by a rising sob, and muffled by a handkerchief. "It's all owing to you, Miss O'Neil. O, how mean of you to come here and make me tell tales out of school! It's just like you, though; you're always—"

"Marian," said Dr. Prescott, "leave the table."

A hush fell on the little party as the poor girl swept out of the room in a tempest of tears. Pauline seemed distressed, and Keller remorseful. Miss O'Neil made rapid passes over her apron, and looked insulted, though evidently rejoiced that the culprit had been brought to justice.

"I never was sent from the table but twice in my life before," sobbed Marian, flinging herself on the wood-box in her mother's room, "and then it was for

rudeness to Miss O'Neil. And she going about like a roaring lion, mamma, picking up gossip!"

Mrs. Prescott doubled the pillow under her head, and partly raised herself on her elbow.

"My dear child, how can you forget that your father insists on your respecting gray hair?"

"O, mamma, I will, and I do when I see it," said Marian, breaking into another whimsical mixture of laughter and tears. "But not false hair—must I? And hers is the falsest I ever saw. Brown week days, and black Sundays!"

Mrs. Prescott hid a smile in the hem of the pillow-case.

"Never mind about faded fronts or shallow wits either, little Marian. We wish our daughter to grow up gentle and refined. A true lady never willingly wounds the feelings of another."

"I know that, mamma, and I do try. But Miss O'Neil is so aggravating! and, you see, I'm naturally very much like papa; my temperament is the same thing right over again."

"Your temperament, dear? What do you mean?"

"O, mamma, don't, please, be offended; but we girls of thirteen have a great many thoughts. I know my mind will never be great and scientific, like my father's; but I'm like him in this; the moment I think anything, it runs along to the end of my tongue, and I just ache to speak it right out. Now, Pauline is like you; she's got a lock and key to her mouth. O, dear! O, dear! If I only had it!"

Mrs. Prescott gazed wonderingly at her little daugh-

ter. Truly girls of thirteen did think straight to the point sometimes.

"There, there, dear, don't analyze yourself any more. Crush back the tears, bathe your face, and tell me how you offended Miss O'Neil."

"Why, you see, mamma, it was about a calf that came to the Academy gate; and he did look so funny, with a white heart in his forehead! and I suppose it was I that let him in, though Marie Smith had the melon rind—she'd just been eating watermelon. We never thought of anybody's riding the calf; but one of the girls did it. And those poplar trees aren't worth a cent for shading the yard; so I suppose somebody looked over and saw; and Miss O'Neil got half the story, as usual, and came here on purpose, and called for her boiled eggs, and set Keller curious. And I was taken by surprise; so I told who the girl was. I ask you if it wasn't mean of Miss O'Neil. I'm sorry for you and my father that I snubbed her, but not on her account, I declare.

"*For, don't I know how 'twill be? My father'll take me out of the Academy. He never liked it, and now he'll think it's horrid. Just for that silly woman, mamma. She hates the High School, but she's pushing me right into it.*

"Just like her! So Irish!"

CHAPTER II.

QUINNEBASSET GIRLS.



HERE is a smooth-tongued river which lies peacefully in its bed all summer, coaxing the trees upon its banks to rest their shadows on its tranquil bosom, yet often rises in rage at the first storms of autumn, tearing away the very trees it had been holding so tenderly.

This fitful little river once did a thriving business, turning sawmills at Quinnebasset; but in one of its mad freaks it carried them away, and the town never quite recovered from their loss. The current of trade set towards Poonoosac, the terminus of the new railroad, five miles below; and the two small mills afterwards rebuilt at Quinnebasset had little to do beyond sawing lumber for village use, or grinding corn for home-made johnny-cakes.

So bereaved Quinnebasset sat down with folded hands among her hills to think. Her brain grew more than her muscle. She ran to courts and schools. A little removed from the main street stood the jail, hiding behind the court-house, as crime sometimes hides behind the cloak of justice. The court-house was of red brick, and wore a pointed crown. It had an arrogant, worldly air, which the white church next it rebuked at

sunset by laying the shadow of its spire, like a warning finger, upon its showy decorations. In Marian's little-girlhood these buildings had seemed emblematical. Red represented the law, while the gospel was pure white.

As for schools, there was the Female Academy on the south side, built of imposing brick, hiding her classic head behind two Lombardy poplars, which, as Marian had said, were "not worth a cent for shading the yard" (when the girls were playing at romps). There was the High School on the north side, held in the old white school-house every autumn by some learned youth, half or three fourths out of college.

Then there was Miss O'Neil's infant class, in her cottage, so low roofed, that the rain-trough under the front eaves drooped over the cross-eyed windows, like unruly hair over a child's eyes. Her wooden doorstep was no larger than a Thanksgiving platter; but at nine o'clock in the morning you would see it crowded with little folks dreading to enter the house. They were sent partly from charity, partly to be "got out of the way;" but the time and patience it had cost their mammas to start them off would have kept them happy at home, whereas at school they were sure to be wretched; for Miss O'Neil, considering the small size of her brain, had the greatest talent ever known for making little folks cry.

"She sets me under the table, side of a mouse's trap," whimpered Benjie, dragged along between his sister Marian and her friend Judith Willard. "When I'm a growed-up man, I won't go to Miss ErNeil to the longest day I live."

Marian and Judith exchanged smiles of heartfelt sympathy.

"Poor little fellow! Don't we know the whole story, Judith? I should think we might, when we 'learned behavior' at the same school. I've been thinking lately how hard it is always to do the very things you most despise. Always, you know — as long as you live at home, I mean. For your parents think it's for your good, and never notice how it takes the heart right out of you."

"There, Marian, don't say a word — you that have a mother. What if she doesn't understand you? Think of me, with none!"

"But this is my father entirely. He says I'm becoming a complete hoiden. That's why he sends me among those great boys. He considers it a 'restraining influence.' *They* don't ride calves — O, no."

"Marian, that school isn't high-toned."

"Plebeian as can be, Judith. Why, the tuition is a dollar less than we give at the Academy, and there's a week more in a term. Those facts speak for themselves, you see. But my father" — Marian, in her pride of ownership, always said *my* father — "thinks of nothing but science and *masteroid* processes. What does he know of the way we girls feel about letting ourselves down to associate with boys?"

"Very true, Marian; but if you go to the High School, I shall go too."

"O, Judith, I don't ask it. I don't expect it."

"Pshaw! what are friends good for if they can't make sacrifices?" said Judith, heroically.

"Jude, you are a blessed old darling!" cried Marian, giving Benjie's hand an emphatic little squeeze.

There was an eloquent pause, during which both girls probably meditated upon the nature of true friendship.

"There's one good thing about it, and that's the Lyceum. O, have you written for the paper, Judith? You know we promised Keller we'd try."

"No," sighed Judith. "I had to finish off a sock for aunt Esther. You know how I'm situated. But do you suppose they'd accept this acrostic?—My last composition, you remember."

Marian took the paper, which was written in rather a quaint, cramped hand.

"C omposition, hateful name!
O , it chills my feeble frame.
M any a sigh escapes my breast,
P enning lines at your request.
O nly let me be excused!
S ure I cannot be refused.
I f mine were a genius rare,
T hen I'd find some thoughts to spare.
I , alas! have none at all,
O r, at most, 'tis very small.
N ow, pray, excuse me, do, this fall.'

"Good metre," said Marian, running it over with a wise look. "Here we are at Miss O'Neil's. Now, Benjie, be polite to her; there's a little man. I mean to bring him up to respect her false hair, if *I* don't, Judith."

"But what do you think of my poetry?" pursued Judith, anxiously. "Would you drop it in the box, or not?"

"You ask me just as if my word was law. Yes, I would put it in, by all means," replied Marian, her face expressing as settled a conviction as if she were foreman of a jury. "I don't know that it's quite the thing for me to say; but, Jude, I actually think you're a genius."

There was a triumphant flash in Judith's eyes at these words, which would have illuminated the "Aurora" gloriously, if it could only have got into the box!

"Yes, dear; I wouldn't say what I didn't believe. How queer it is, when you just think of it, that two friends, like you and me, should both have a talent for poetry!"

The flash in Judith's eyes faded a little. So she must share her laurels with Marian, though she knew, away down in her secret soul, that Marian had no true ear for rhythm, having more than once translated her Latin exercises into heroic verse with as many feet as a caterpillar.

"She doesn't know false measure when I show it to her," mused Judith, with an abstracted look in the direction of a pair of oxen, which she probably did not see, but very likely saw *through*.

"Yes, I declare, they do look like goblins with their hair on end!"

"What, the oxen?"

"O, no, Marian; our Academy poplars."

"What an idea, Judith! Is that original?"

"No, I read it. See how their hair seems to stand right up straight, and that weeping willow's hair over in Mrs. Selden's yard hangs right down over its shoulders. Such a contrast!"

But Marian did not answer. She was running to

meet a party of girls who were pouring out of the yard.

"O, girls, girls, that calf has just ruined me entirely!"

"What calf? O, I know. Where did he hurt you?" returned Marie Smith, taking a mellow cucumber out of her pocket.

"Girls, just listen; that everlasting Miss Soap-suds—"

"Who's she?" interrupted the literal Marie, paring her cucumber.

"Why, Miss O'Neil. She came to our house last night, just bubbling over. And it was 'Miriam Linscott,' she said, 'that did all the mischief, and went in front of the rear.' And such a scolding about boys, when all the while she meant calves. Somehow my tongue slipped, with her and Keller both teasing me, and I spoke Naomi's name right out. Now, girls, you don't think I'd be so mean as to tell on purpose? Say, do you?"

"No, indeed," cried a chorus of voices; "but never mind; *Mrs. Hackett* knows; so it's all over town by this time, and your telling didn't make the least difference."

"That isn't what I care for," added Marian, with a wistful look at the dear old Academy; "but I've got to leave school. My father hasn't liked it for a long while; he thinks it's too free and easy; and now he's going to see Miss Lightbody, and tell her he prefers to have me study with Keller."

"O, what a shame!" exclaimed the young ladies;

"just for Naomi Giddings! He needn't think we're all such romps as she!"

Naomi was decidedly unpopular, and as she happened to be absent, it was the most natural thing in the world to stab her in the back.

"We can't spare you," cried half a dozen girls, crowding around Marian like needles round a magnet. "What gay old times we've had together!"

"Who'll bring milk to eat with my pickles?" said Marie.

"Who'll make up faces for us on the slate?" said another.

"How poky 'twill be, with nobody to set us all laughing!"

"Don't say a word," returned Marian, with tears in her eyes, though highly gratified, nevertheless. "I feel as if I belonged here. There's no place like home. I'd like to carry off those dear old piazza pillars, scrawled with all your handwritings."

Perhaps "friendship publishments" were peculiar to Quinnebasset; at any rate, here at the Female Academy they were paraded on the pillars in pencil-mark, as much a matter of course as the publishments of marriage on the outside of the meeting-house. Thus:—

("Marian Prescott and Judith Willard, sworn friends.")

("Marie Smith and Oscaforia Jones, sworn friends.")

Each pair enclosed in brackets, which seemed to shut them in to a sort of sacred privacy.

"Well, there," said Marian, shaking off a tear, "I'm not Samson, and can't move pillars; but I can do bet-

ter. I can move Judith. She's going to the High School, too."

"Judith? Why, that's too bad," exclaimed the girls, with feeble remonstrance.

"Precious little they care," thought Judith, setting her lips together proudly. Yet there were girls there who did not like Marian, whereas of Judith it might be said that she never had an enemy.

CHAPTER III.

PAULINE AND KELLER.

 O you suppose it's anything like the brand of Cain?" asked Judith, thoughtfully. "Only in a different part of the face?"

The question had reference to a slight blemish on the High School teacher's otherwise pleasing countenance—a brown mark, the size of a large copper cent, high up on the left cheek-bone.

"O, no," replied Marian, confidently. "Cain's mark was not visible; so the Bible Dictionary says. That reminds me that last summer I wrote an essay on him."

"An essay on Cain!"

"Yes; my father wishes us to learn Bible history; so he gives us books of reference, and has us write long strings of things he calls essays. It's capital fun; but you ought to see what a bungle Keller makes of it. I actually pity him sometimes; and, Judith, do you know he is to speak in Lyceum next week? I declare I shall want to stay at home."

Judith said nothing; but she thought Dr. Prescott's children ought to find no task too difficult for them. Ah, if she herself only had such a father! She and Marian had now been attending the High School some

days. It was humiliating indeed to go from the aristocratic walls of the Female Academy to a low-ceiled school-house; from cane-seated chairs to wooden benches; from elegant desks — behind whose lids you could eat taffy and peanuts — to rude ones, with nothing but sliding boards to answer the purpose of drawers.

Still there is a silver lining to every cloud, if one could only get on the right side to look for it. Mr. Loring was a better scholar and a more faithful teacher than Miss Lightbody. He was no stranger to the girls, being a law student of Judge Dillingham's, and a frequent visitor at Dr. Prescott's. Moreover Marian and Judith had not been doing much in Latin, beyond translating a few odes of Horace into very irregular metre; and, in their blind ignorance of the Grammar, it was rather stimulating to find themselves now in a class where they were required to give a reason and a rule, and no allowance made for mistakes.

"If it is plebeian here, it's thorough," said Marian. "O, how we've been galloping over our Arithmetic! Don't you feel ashamed?"

"On the whole," admitted Judith, "perhaps it's as well we came. And then, too, we can be such a help to the boys!"

Robert Willard might have smiled if he had heard Judith say this. He felt himself well fitted to stand up and brave the storms of life without any aid from his delicate young sister. Keller Prescott, too, would have scorned the idea of being influenced by a girl! Still, they liked to have Marian and Judith at school,

and in their classes, if only for the sake of getting a stronger assurance of their own superiority.

"Pauline!" cried Keller, slamming the side-door like a north-easter; "where's Pauline?"

"In the dining-room," called she. "Don't step on the tacks."

"Who cares for tacks? I'm on the affirmative, and the boys are all up about it."

"Up? What for?" said Pauline, coolly, continuing to nail down the oil-cloth in front of the stove.

"What for? Why, because I'm put on the question, instead of one of the rest. I'm the first boy in my class that has had such an honor," added he, jogging his sister's elbow, by way of pointing the remark. "I suppose you know that."

"I know you've made me pound my finger."

"Hit the wrong nail, hey? Sorry! I'm off now to consult the Cyclopaedias. Got to read up from the foundation of the world down to the last town-meeting.—Where's Josephus?"

"Josephus! Do tell me, have you got to speak on theology?" said Pauline, laying down the hammer.

"Of course not. Question reads, 'Resolved, that the evil men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.' That's Shakespeare; Antony said it of Cæsar. I contend that Antony was right. I think precisely the reverse, mind you; but when we speechify, we do it for the sake of argument, you understand."

"To be sure," laughed Pauline. "Now my advice to you is, just to shut yourself into the library, and not

come out till tea-time. You know how it is with you; it's so hard for you to fix your thoughts!"

"Why, Pauline!" exclaimed the boy, evidently wounded. "Just mention anybody that can harp on one string longer than I can."

"On a bow-string or a fish-line," thought Pauline, but wisely refrained from saying it. She had her own private convictions as to the success her brother would meet with in writing, and gazed after him wistfully, as he crossed the narrow isthmus of entry, and passed into the sitting-room. He did not stop to have any words with Marian, who was at the bay window, helping Benjie blow bubbles, but passed on, across the front entry into his father's office, and out of that into the library—a small room, whose walls were lined with books, and whose door had the advantage of a good lock and key.

For a while there was a great noise of dragging heavy volumes across the floor, and shoving chairs against the table, with a monotonous undertone of whistling; and in the course of an hour Keller emerged from the library, his hair standing up fierce and thick, like the Black Forest, the daring look gone from his face, and his full black eyes wide open with the stare of a somnambulist.

"Pauline," said he, stealthily waylaying her, as she was bringing butter out of the cellar, "I've got ideas enough; fact is, I've got too many. All that pesters me is, what to do with 'em. Suppose,—well, you know, suppose I tell you exactly what to write, and then *you* write it."

Pauline met her brother's rather sheepish look with a good-natured smile.

"Yes, my boy; but let me toast the bread first; and you run in and ask mother whether she'll have currant jelly or quince marmalade."

"Pauline, you're a diamond," said Keller, with a relieved look.

But his exalted opinion of her was destined to a fall. With the best intentions in the world, she could not seize the thoughts he did not give her. Keller had a high ideal. Away up out of reach, he dimly saw the very thing he wanted—an iron chain of argument, festooned with graceful flowers of rhetoric. O, if he could only get at it!

"I want the speech to be real sound, you know, and sort of elegant, too. We must get in something about Brutus. 'Be ready, gods,' says he, 'with all your thunderbolts; dash him to pieces!' and so forth. 'Put a tongue in every wound of Cæsar,' says Antony. Something about Nero and his fiddle, and Bloody Mary, ~~and~~ that wicked old what's-her-name that stirred up the Huguenot fight. Something about Oliver Cromwell—wouldn't you? And Scripture, too. 'As a tree lieth, so shall it fall.' And nobody remembers anything now of Andre but those papers in his boots. Evil lives after men, you understand; the good is buried with their bones—that's the point of the argument. And wind off with a verse of *Paradise Lost*, or some such."

"Why, Keller Prescott," said Pauline, laughing outright, "you're worse than Miss O'Neil! Of all the

whirlabout heads! Go to Marian, and see if you can make her understand. I'm sure I haven't the brains."

"Marian! What does she know of logic?" said Keller, wheeling suddenly round, and stalking out of the room with ineffable disdain.

"Poor boy, I wish I could help him," thought the kind elder sister; "but it is evident I was not intended for the rostrum. And of course he is too proud to go to father."

That was the last Pauline heard of "the affirmative" till the next Wednesday evening, when she started for the Lyceum with fear and trembling, Marian and Judith trudging beside her in the moonlight.

"Won't it seem odd to hear our Keller speak before all those people?" said Marian. "Against Silas Hackett, too, who has such a nimble tongue! So still as the boy has kept! How could he get a speech ready without turning the whole house upside down?"

"Don't borrow trouble, child," said the older sister, uneasily; but she herself needed the warning. Her family pride was strong, and she had a restless foreboding of mortification to come.

Judith, for her part, was in a little flutter of suspense regarding her poem. Would, or would it not, be received?

The seats were well filled to-night. Many of the boys were forced to stand against the walls, wriggling their caps between their teeth, the awful president watching them from his desk.

Marian and Pauline looked around for Keller.

He was sitting quite serene in one of the middle seats, snuffing a candle between a jackknife and a slate, kerosene lamps being forbidden by Lyceum law. What was the boy thinking of, to be so calm?

CHAPTER IV.

KELLER AND MARIAN.

MISTER LORING, the president, had told Pauline that Keller was not to open the question, and this was a great relief to the anxious sister.

There were two disputants on each side, and the first to rise was Pitkin Jones. Keller snuffed the candle, and smiled ironically. There was always more or less smiling when Pitkin spoke. His hands were very white, and he kept them waving like flags of truce, or poked them through his hair till it resembled the course of true love, which never did run smooth. Some of the young girls listened to him with rapt attention. To be sure, they did not clearly understand what he was talking about, but then the mystification was delightful. Judith thought it sounded like Tennyson. After quite a lengthy harangue, Pitkin gave his vest pocket a final pound, and sat down, amid loud applause from the small boys.

"If I haven't more logic than that fellow, I hope I may be shot," thought Keller, conning over and over the words of his speech: "Mr. President: sir, I rise on this occasion," &c. He had it safe and sure. Ever since Pauline had said, "You know, Keller, how hard it is for you to fix your thoughts," he had worked at

that speech, to use his own comparison, "like a Dutch dog at a churn." It was not absolutely perfect, perhaps, but he did think a youth of his age had seldom written one as good. He was not vain; but facts are facts, and in this case would speak for themselves.

Next in order came Silas Hackett. "Glad I have the use of my legs," thought Keller. "*He* walks like a galvanized frog." His motions were certainly rather jerky; but then, as the villagers declared, "Silas was tongue-y." He knew what he had to say, and said it; and, though he might not round his sentences as well as that piece of eloquence, Pitkin Jones, yet he could point them better; and, when you are debating a question, point is something. Pauline might well dread to have her brother rise after the sensible Mr. Hackett.

And now comes Keller Prescott. Really he is a handsome youth. His face is very pale, as if at a white heat, and a strange fire burns in his eyes. How he gets down the aisle he does not know, for his legs have suddenly turned into a pair of walking-sticks—no joints—no feet. Talk of galvanized frogs! But in some mysterious way he finds himself "taking the floor," which spins under him.

The air is full of eyes—every eye pricking along his nerves like a needle. He tries to speak, but there is something in his throat—it is his heart! Yes, it thumps close to his palate, fills his whole chest, has become as large, to say the least, as a bass drum. Now he has somehow got inside of it. Speaking may let him out; it must, it will.

He turns his back upon Mr. Loring, and convulsively shrieks, with a wild bow at nothing,—

“Mr. President!”

What! It is a whisper!

He wheels right about face.

“Mr. President: sir!”

This time it is a hoarse growl, like “low and muttering summer thunder.”

“Mr. Prescott,” responds the president, with an encouraging smile.

But where is Keller's speech? He throws up both hands, but he cannot catch it; could as soon grasp the evening star. A moment ago it was here; now where? Gone! “Gone, like the light, quick shiver of a wing.”

“Well, I might as well give up now. I've been and gone and done it this time,” thinks poor Keller, with a vague pity for the boys he had formerly laughed at. He looks up, reckless with despair. Out of the sea of eyes one pair shines down on him with love and good cheer. It was as if Pauline had sung to her boy,—

“There's a light in the window for thee.”

That great bass drum dissolved like a bank of fog. Keller felt that he was out of it; he was free. Pauline shouldn't be ashamed of him; he would surprise her just as he had all along intended to do.

And, with one of the sudden transitions, so characteristic of the boy, he roused himself, shook off his stage fright, took a bold step forward, made a graceful bow, and finding his speech would not come back, began with perfect ease to—make up another.

“The question is, Mr. President, does the evil men

do live after them, while the good is interred with their bones? I contend that it does."

A slight pause. Marian leaned forward, with lips apart. Pauline sat motionless. "What would he say next?" That was precisely what the boy was curious to know himself!

"Mr. President: Mark Antony felt very bitter when he said those words. And he had reason to," continued Keller, his voice gathering force as he went on, till its clear boyish ring was heard to the farthest corner of the room. "Mark Antony knew the Romans had forgotten all Cæsar's noble deeds, and were swooping down on him like a flock of vultures on a dead lion. O, yes! And Antony didn't dare to praise him. O, no! For the Romans thought he had one fault—he was too ambitious.

"And, Mr. President, it's just so this minute. You let a man do one bad thing, and that's the end of him. Let two men come here to Quinnebasset, sir; one just out of our jail—been in for stealing a horse; and the other hadn't; he had behaved himself, and taken care of his mother. Well, who'd notice the good man? He'd only done his duty, sir. And in case he should die, how many of us would go to his funeral, Mr. President, he being a stranger? And wouldn't the good he'd done be shovelled right on top o' the coffin with the dirt, sir? To be sure it would; and perhaps the sexton would drive in a stick for a gravestone, and perhaps he wouldn't.

"But now there's that horse thief, Mr. President. *His work follows him!* And it's all the work he gets, Mr. President. Why, you wouldn't let him black your

boots, sir! There isn't a woman in this town would let him black her stove, sir.

"And supposing he should die, would the evil be shovelled into his grave? Not a bit of it! If he leaves a family, I declare they ought to be pitied. Everybody'd remember their father was a jail-bird. The evil lives after him, don't you see, sir? and you can't kill it out, any more than Canada thistles.

"That's all I have to say, Mr. President. It's no use to talk all night, sir, on a plain question like this."

Whereupon the young orator marched to his seat, and quietly snuffed out his candle.

"Well done," said all faces; and the small boys clapped with a will. Pauline sent him a glance of hearty approval; but Keller kept his head turned away, watching a little libation of candle-grease cooling on his thumb. He seemed to shrink, with boyish modesty, from meeting any one's eyes, when all were so eloquent of praise.

There was more speaking, after which the vote was taken, and the knotty question "laid on the table."

Then came the paper. Judith listened with throbbing heart, hoping, yet dreading, to hear her acrostic. Marian's checks turned suddenly white. What was Mr. Lyman reading about a "wanderer on the face of the earth"? Her own words, scribbled on a slate in the barn! Her essay on Cain, composed at her father's request, and "pooh-poohed" by him as very "bombastic." How had it crept into the "Aurora"? She had certainly left it in the big atlas in the library. Who knew but her father had given it to Mr. Lyman with his own hands? Then he must have liked it bet-

ter than he pretended. Didn't it sound grand, though? The sentences rolled along like battle music, with, now and then, a terrific crash. Marian was in ecstasies. If her father were only there to hear! How proud he would be of his son and daughter, if he could only know.

But Marian was not left to revel in perfect triumph. Mr. Lyman finished reading, folded the sheet, looked up, and said,—

“This article must be heard with indulgence, on account of the extreme youth of the writer.”

“Isn't that mean?” thought trembling Marian, “when it would have passed for a grown-up piece!”

To her relief, however, the audience all kept their seats, and did not even turn their heads, as might have been expected, to gaze about the house with curiosity; otherwise she knew she should have blushed and betrayed herself.

“Judith,” said she, as they walked home together, arm in arm, “what did Mr. Lyman mean by saying, ‘This article must be heard with indulgence?’ Now, was that a compliment, or not?”

“O, a compliment, of course.”

“Do you really think so? I—I—was afraid he might have meant the thing was so silly he had to make excuses for it. But wasn't it queer it should have got into the paper, when I never put it there, and your acrostic, that you did put in, wasn't read at all? What in the world—”

“Hush, Marian; Mr. Loring and Pauline are just behind us,” whispered heart-sore Judith, too proud to talk about her trials. That was always the way, she

thought. To Marian all the bright and rare things, to herself nothing but disappointments. There was a difference even in their dresses. Marian's fitted smoothly, her own never did; they were as full o' wrinkles as an old woman's face. It wasn't fair to tell her this was because she stooped; she knew better. It was because they were fadged out of old-fashioned, second-hand things. Aunt Esther had once been a tailoress, but Judith couldn't see that that was any reason she should try to fit dresses. She wished aunt Esther didn't "feel such an interest." "With six children to feed and clothe, folks must be '*equinomical*,' or they can't make both ends meet." So said the good woman, as she trimmed Judith's linings, making both ends of the scissors meet in the child's neck.

Now, this was rather vexing, when, as everybody knew, Mr. Willard was a "fore-handed" merchant, worth twice as much as Dr. Prescott.

Perhaps we all of us unconsciously envy somebody, and I am sure poor little Judith had no idea she was murmuring against Providence, when she wished she had a sweet mother, like Mrs. Prescott, instead of "*equinomical*" aunt Esther, and wished she had an older sister Pauline, and wished —

But before she had "swung round the circle" of her wishes Marian gave her elbow a squeeze, and called her attention to Robert, just in advance of them, saying to Miss O'Neil, "Will you take my arm?" For the last of the royal Irish family was limping with a wretchedly tight shoe; and, disagreeable as she might be, and often as she had boxed his ears, Robert would go out of his way any time to befriend her, simply



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because she was a forlorn old soul, and he was naturally chivalrous towards women.

"Thank you, Samuel. I always thought everything of your family," replied Miss O'Neil, graciously, accepting the proffered arm with a smile like sunshine on clear honey. "You learned your behavior at my school, dear. You are as polite as the young men at Machias."

"Just hear that Soapsuds!" whispered Marian. "Why, Rob's taller than she is. Isn't he monstrous?"

Judith thought not. He was just right, shaggy head, high shoulders, and all. And that reminded her that she loved him dearly, and that Marian hadn't everything in the world, after all.

"Perhaps he isn't as handsome as Keller; but I guess beauty isn't everything," said she, straightening her shoulders.

"O, Rob's worth two of Keller," said Marian, coolly: "I always knew that."

"Well, I never," returned Judith, much pleased. "If I thought so I wouldn't own it. What a queer girl you are!"

They had now reached Dr. Prescott's. As Marian entered the sitting-room, she was surprised to see her mother in the easy-chair; for since her recent illness, Mrs. Prescott seldom sat up late of an evening. Keller, who had been at home some minutes, was kneeling on the rug at her feet, making extravagant gestures.

"Why, mother, I was surprised at myself! Tell you what, sir; I hadn't the least idea I could make such a

speech! Off hand, too! Extempore. Why it flashed out of my mouth, sir, just like forked lightning."

Here Keller, seeing Marian, sprang up in some confusion. These little private confabs he sometimes held with his mother were intended for her ear alone. It was embarrassing to have them overheard by a third person.

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

"Be good, fair maid, and let who will be clever;
Do noble deeds, not dream them, all day long,
And so make life, death, and the vast forever
One grand, sweet song."

 HERE, mother wrote that on this card more than a year ago, and when she gave it to me, I slipped it right into my journal. It was the next day after my essay on Cain was read in the Lyceum, and I suppose my head *was* a little high, and mother noticed it.

"I am glad it was not you who put that article in the paper," said she; "it was more excusable in Keller."

She and my father have such a way of taking people down! Mother does it gently, just as she would draw her Madeira vine away from the sun; but my father does it with a thump. I understand my father, and I don't care; but Keller feels it; it makes him sore.

After that first speech of his at the Lyceum, when he thought himself a second Cicero, and went about the house declaiming before all the looking-glasses, my father told him he mustn't be lifted up by that one

success ; he mustn't think words would always flow right into his mouth.

"Why," said my father, "you had been thinking of the subject so much, that, even though you forgot your written speech, the ideas were all in your mind. So don't fancy you can do without hard work. Don't go into the floor to make a speech, trusting to the inspiration of the moment."

But Keller only thought my father didn't appreciate him, and he put on that look of his, as if he knew better than anybody else, which is so provoking in Keller. And next time he spoke he didn't prepare himself at all ; and what a piece of work he made ! A great lawyer he'll be, if he doesn't apply himself more ! I wish he were like Robert Willard ; and then again I don't know that I do. Rob's so big and clumsy ! And what outlandish-looking coats his aunt Esther does make for him !

But there, I mustn't sit dreaming. My father says reveries are very enervating to the mind. Not that this is exactly a reverie, though ; not like Judith's. She gets lost in hers, like a thick fog. Come out here,

Miss Tottenham.

March 3. (It is more than a year, Miss T., since you and I had a chat. I do feel ashamed. But writing is not easy for me ; it's like catching thistle-down. What has happened this year ?)

Mother has had several ill turns. My father talks of sending her to Cuba.

(That looks badly in black and white. Still I am sure there is no danger of her dying. Miss O'Neil said

to her once, "I hope you're prepared for the other world, Mrs. Linscott; your case is alarming." "Don't say alarming," answered my dear mother, with a smile. "I am not afraid; I know God will do right." And so He will, I am sure. He cannot mean to take her away from us. There are women who can be spared, hard as it must be,—but not my mother. But think of Miss O'Neil exhorting *her*, when she's an angel, and has belonged to the church for years and years !)

Pauline is as good as ever.

(Yes, she never scolds any one but me. She comes often, and puts my room to rights, and then reads me a little lecture; but I try to be patient. I know dirt and disorder annoy Pauline very much; there's the trouble. Her mind runs on such trifles.)

She would make a capital wife.

(I never thought of such a thing till last week, and then it flashed into my mind, Why does Mr. Loring come here so much to read German, when they don't always read it? And I made that remark to Pauline, and she only said, just as red as a rose, "Little girls shouldn't be always surmising." I don't know what you call surmising. I don't think I surmised before, but now I do; I can't help it.)

Judith and I have been going to High School autumns, and to town school winters, and I think we have learned well; and it has been a help to the boys. Robert was always as steady as a mill, but Keller is very flighty. He ran away when he was twelve years old.

(There, I wish I hadn't written that! He can learn

quicker than I; but he puts it off till the last minute, playing base ball or something, so I get ahead of him; but that mortifies him, and then he studies with a vengeance. I ought not to record how he ran away, though. I'll take a pounce, and see if I can erase it neatly.)

My father regrets that we have no graded school at Quinnebasset. Keller has been at Exeter ever since last September. Judith says her aunt Esther thinks my father ~~is crazy to send him~~, for he can't afford it.

(I suppose she knows! It seems very lonesome, for Keller was always whistling. It is so muddy that people don't go out much, and Pauline told Benjie she would give him ten cents a day if he would swing the gate every hour, to make believe somebody was coming. There, I hear Judith down stairs.)

"Come right up here, Judith, into my 'little white chamber of bliss.' O, how pretty you are, dear!—I mean when the color flies into your face. Do you think you'll ever be married?"

"Why, Marian Prescott, what a funny question! How can I tell?"

"Yes, it is funny; but you can't guess what I was thinking, just this minute, about you and Keller! O, ever and ever so many years by and by! Perhaps you could make a man of him. Don't you think he's handsome? Needn't curl your lip so, Judith. I don't mean any harm."

"Was I curling my lip? Keller is very handsome, and I think a great deal of *you*, but I—I—It doesn't hurt your feelings to have me speak out so plainly—

does it?" said Judith, in all seriousness; "but I—I—don't think I shall ever marry."

"O, it's just as well," returned Marian, with some coldness, "just as well; you needn't apologize."

And, having made her friend an offer of marriage by proxy, and been flatly rejected, Miss Prescott began to toss over the ribbons in her collar-box with unnecessary vigor.

It was as if two young nestlings in a tree had had a slight disagreement regarding a worm a mile out of reach. Neither of the young misses thought of smiling at the simplicity of Judith in "refusing before she was asked."

But it was rather odd that, for the first time in their lives, they should happen to be disposing of Keller on this particular evening, while at the same moment there was a great excitement about him down stairs.

Dr. Prescott had come in with the mail, and handed his wife a letter from Keller, postmarked Exeter. Miss O'Neil was present, but happily did not observe that Mrs. Prescott, as she opened the letter, turned deathly pale, and sank back in her chair with a smothered groan.

"Well, what does the boy say?" asked the doctor, paring a Baldwin, and throwing the skin into the fire.

Mrs. Prescott commanded her voice to reply,—

"I infer that he is well; he says very little."

"I hope he'll see the error of his ways, and turn while yet the lamp holds out to burn!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil, adding, piously, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

Miss O'Neil was fond of quoting Scripture, especially in case of people she did not like. Whether it suited

the occasion or not made no difference; it always had a "solemnizing effect."

In a little while Mrs. Prescott rose, touched her husband's sleeve with her finger, then passed out of the room; and he presently followed.

An indefinite dreadful something had passed over the doctor before he returned. Pauline trembled, though without knowing why, when he filled Miss O'Neil's "contribution-bag" with apples, and very politely requested her to go home, as Mrs. Prescott was taken suddenly ill, and their must be perfect quiet throughout the house.

Half an hour after, Marian and Judith were electrified by Pauline's rushing wildly into the chamber, whispering, with chattering teeth, "*Girls, Keller is married!*"

CHAPTER VI.

“THE VALLEY OF WORMWOOD.”

“**M**ARRIED!” cried Marian, seizing her sister’s arm, and crushing it convulsively. “Not our Keller!”

“Not our Keller!” echoed Judith, dreamily. “What Keller? Who’s married?”

Pauline answered by throwing some dainty wedding-cards on the floor, and bursting into tears.

“I can’t understand you, the room whirls so,” moaned Marian. “Was it in the school-house? Who did it? Little boys like Keller—’tisn’t possible!”

Judith took up the cards, tied together with white taste.

“Brownie Snow,” read she.

“Yes, I know. Brownie, Brownie, Brownie, has been every other word in his letters all the term. Still we never thought — O, Judith!”

With ready sympathy Judith threw both her arms around her friend, and said, soothingly,—

“Never mind it, dear. I read once of a boy who was married at sixteen, and grew up a respectable man. Think how much worse it might have been. Suppose, now, Keller had burnt up his Prex’s wig, and been expelled.”

"Yes, yes, that would have been worse. But I tell you, I won't bear it!" cried Marian, wildly. "Think of a little girl coming here to go to school with me that I'll have to introduce as, 'My sister, *Mrs.* Prescott'! Short dresses! Outrageous! Let me go, Judith."

Pauline laughed hysterically.

How little these girls knew of what they were talking about! How faintly they could comprehend the lifelong sorrow which had fallen upon two devoted parents!

"Marian, where are you going? No, not now. You must not see mother to-night. She is dreadfully prostrated; I had to put her to bed."

"There, Pauline, how could you, when I might have been a comfort to mother! O, dear, it all comes of dime novels!"

"Don't scream so, Marian. What do you mean by dime novels?"

"He had his shelf piled with them years and years ago. 'I tell you what it is, they're *neat*,' said he. 'Hunters, and robbers, and runaway brides.' He knew my father would never allow such things in the house. I told him if I saw another, I'd burn it up. He didn't take it kindly—not as he would from you, Pauline. I spoke very gently; but I never saw another dime novel. But he must have had them. O, dear, if I'd told—"

"Marian, hear me a moment, and stop screaming. You are not to mention Keller's name before mother. It was only on that condition that father allowed me to tell you."

“Did my father think I couldn’t be trusted? Why, Pauline, when I’m so tender of mother!”

“And of course this affair is not to be known in the village at present. We are sure of you, Judith; and as for Marian, her pride will keep her silent. Father is going to Exeter to-morrow to bring them—to bring him home. And I’ve sent for aunt Filura; for when mother has these shivering attacks, I feel safer with her in the house. There, good night, girls,” said Pauline, suddenly breaking down. “My poor, rash boy, if you had only died!”

The house was very still next day. Dr. Prescott had gone to Exeter. Thankful, usually known as Widow Works, was ironing in list slippers; Pauline rolling crackers for gruel, with the pantry door shut; and Marian, in her mother’s room, holding the dear invalid’s hand, and reading softly some of the most soothing parts of the Gospel of St. John. The little girl felt safer so. Her tongue, being harnessed and kept in check, could not leap over barriers, and go trampling on forbidden ground.

Cousin Filura Wix had come, and was seated before the fire in the sitting-room, pegging a mitten with a whalebone hook. The front breadth of her dress was folded back over her knees, disclosing a quilted black skirt, and the toes of a pair of gray kerseymere shoes. No matter what the time or place, never since she could distinguish right from wrong had Miss Wix been guilty of the wilful extravagance of fading her gown by an open blaze. Upon the fire-frame, at a safe distance from the hot centre, stood her gay striped socks, drying their hat soles; for with a strange inconsistency Miss Wix

clothed her feet in all the gorgeousness of Solomon's lilies, while her head went mourning in a black cap.

"O, my! Aren't they bouncers?" said Benjie, fingering admiringly the cat's-fur border of the socks.

"Yes, dear," said Miss Wix, looking up with a placid smile, "the Lord has given me large feet, and I don't mean to pinch 'em. Socks are most an excellent thing in a petticoat snow; but I'm jealous I've got some cold, after all, for my head feels tight."

Miss Wix took out her handkerchief. It was one of her peculiarities that she always blew her nose as if it belonged to an enemy. It was not alone the vehemence of the action; there was besides a strange awkwardness about it, as though it were a first experiment. Benjie watched her in interested silence.

"Aunt Filura," said Marian, appearing at the door, "I've read mother fast asleep."

"Then, Benjamin, wouldn't it be advisable for you to go out doors and play?"

"No; I'm afraid I'll 'sturb mamma, stayin' round here; guess I'll go see Hen Page," said Benjie, with a roguish side-glance at Miss Wix, who peered back at him in perplexity.

"It wouldn't do for me to take such a responsibility," said she, after some reflection. "You must not go visiting without the full consent of your sister Paulina." (Paulina with a long 'i.')

Benjie skipped away, smiling half sarcastically, as such young creatures will, when they find themselves a puzzle or an embarrassment to their betters. Miss Wix had very little "faculty with children." Benjie had the impression that her caresses were made up of

elbows and Roman nose; and, though he respected her intensely, he was by no means fond of her. Marian, as she grew older, was learning to value the good woman at something like her true worth. That "my father" called her "one of Nature's noblewomen" had great weight with her.

"Aunt Filura," said she,—Miss Wix was Dr. Prescott's cousin and stanch friend, and usually called aunt by the children,—"why do you suppose this dreadful trial was sent upon us? You know, if anybody does, and I wish you'd tell."

Miss Wix looked up from her pegging with a peaceful smile.

"You've asked me a pretty snug question, Mary Ann.—Don't sprawl down on the rug so.—It isn't for us to map out the Lord's designs; but there's good to come out of them, you may depend on that."

"Yes, so I've heard ever since I was born. But when I see poor mamma so white and weak, and my father with his lips set together,—O, auntie, what right had Keller, a silly boy, to behave so? And we supposing he was learning his lessons! To think God should allow—"

"Hush, Mary Ann; stop right there. You may express your mind about Keller; I suppose that's natural; and I won't deny but what he's played the fool; but don't you go to mixing it up with insinuations against your heavenly Father. If Keller had asked to be led in the right way, do you expect he'd have got into this scrape?"

"No; O, no! But I was wondering," said Marian,

timidly, "why God should let mother suffer so. Couldn't he have prevented Keller's marrying?"

"Certainly, child. He could have made Keller a machine, and then turned him with a crank. But he chose to make him a human being, knowing right from wrong. Have you anything to say against that? Do you wish we were puppets, Mary Ann?"

"No, auntie; but—"

"Nor I don't, either. I'm thankful for the gift of free will, though it is a fearful privilege, and I make a curious bungle of it every day I live. For you see," added Miss Wix, her face glowing with an inner light, "there's this comfort: Let us bungle as we will, or our friends either, there is the Lord right behind it, turning it to some good use. Trust him, Mary Ann. He'll bring a blessing out of this."

"O, auntie, I don't seem to feel acquainted with Him, as you do," said Marian, wistfully.

"Then it's high time you did," said Miss Wix, attempting to stroke Marian's bright hair, but thinking better of it, and picking up a stitch with her pegging-hook. "Put your arms right round his neck, child, and call him Father—that's all he asks of you."

Marian looked up at the serene old face reverently. How lovely it was, transfigured by such a beauty of expression!

"I want to ask you," said Marian, after a pause, "what you suppose my father intends to do with Keller."

"Fetch him home, and set him at work on that heater piece he bought last fall."

"But the—the girl?"

"Well, it's likely her mother, if she's got one, will take care of her for the present."

"Then you don't think my father'll bring her to this house? Pauline didn't know. O, what a relief!"

"Thankful," whispered Marian, stealing into the kitchen, "don't look so glum. Cousin Wix thinks my father won't bring her home."

"I never took your father for a fool," responded Widow Works, scraping a kettle with subdued wrath. "He'd ought to put 'em both in the lunatic asylum, and I hope he'll be stren-oo-ous enough to do it."

The words were sharp, but their edge was rather dulled by a falling tear.

"Keller is as good-hearted a boy as ever lived," went on the drunkard's widow, in the sweet, even tones which never failed her in her deepest anger, "and I feel very homely towards the folks that have made a fool of him."

"I don't know what you mean, Thankful," said Pauline, who stood by the table, bathing her swollen eyes in cold tea.

"Well, in plain words, I mean the girl's mother. Not that I ever set eyes on the woman; but I've heard of just such a case, and you see 'f I ain't right about it. We'd ought to be resigned to what the Lord sends upon us," continued Widow Works, somewhat bitterly; "but that don't prevent us from hating the instrument."

"I wish Thankful wouldn't talk religion," thought Marian. "It isn't the real thing, I know by the snapping of her eyes. A woman that hated her husband too, and can't forgive him now he's dead."

CHAPTER VII.

BROWNIE SNOW.

Miss Tottenham.

MARCH 7.

T was very strange. Keller has startled us many times before, but never like this. Father went to Exeter to bring him home. O, how I hated the instrument, as Thankful says, whoever it was.

In the first place I wanted to make a fire in my room, and stay there, and not see Keller. But Pauline said, "No; what good would that do? Sinners get punished in other ways; it's not for us to try to punish them." She put on her crimson dress, which Robert Willard says makes her look like a winter rose. How she loves that boy! I mean Keller. Partly because he is not expected to take care of his room. If he was expected to, wouldn't there be short-comings?

I came up here and locked my door. I felt outraged. Why should that naughty boy trample on us so, and ruin my father, who had hard work to get money to send him to school? I didn't feel any more affection for him than I did for that stove. I was all out of sorts to think things had gone so hap-hazard, till I remembered what blessed aunt Wix said about God's being behind it; and then I did try as hard as



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I could to "put my arms around his neck and call him Father." Somehow, after that, I began to love Keller again, and make excuses for him. "Feather-brained he came into the world," thought I, "and feather-brained he'll go out of it." I do pity him, for all Pauline thinks I'm just such another! If he must always be troubling our parents, and tearing open their hearts, let me be the one to pour in the oil and wine. Perhaps I was born for that very purpose.

At any rate, I concluded to put on my blue merino, as wearing my worst clothes wouldn't stop the marriage now; and I went down and carried mother her toast with a smile. She kissed me, and called me "a comfort." I found afterwards she had been afraid I should prove a trial. They all seem to watch me, as if I were the weather.

Benjie was rather noisy, and I took him to the bay-window, and let him look out at the far-off blue mountains fading into the sky; when, before we thought of such a thing, the stage drove up, and out stepped my father in a great hurry. No Keller.

"Well, girls, how is your mother?" said he. He would ask that if the house was afire. I had my arms round him, and was just going to find out where Keller was, when there stood Miss O'Neil, bubbling all over with curiosity. It seemed as if her eyes would drop off her face — they're only stuck on the outside.

"Where's the bride, Dr. Linscott? I never knew 'twas a mixed school before. Foolish *Galathian*, he wouldn't be thought anything of at Machias."

Pauline turned to me with a frown. As if I had told! I, who am as deep as a well!

"As near as I can make out," said the tiresome old thing, "I was the only one he sent a wedding card to. So I thought I'd be the first to call on the bride."

There! Pauline knew then who had told! It was Keller himself. The news was going all over the village like wildfire. While Miss O'Neil stood swinging her door-key on her finger, in walked mother, trembling like a white lily in a breeze; and my father ran and caught her right up in his arms, and laid her on the sofa.

"Let us have quiet here," said he, sternly. "Every soul of you, go into the dining-room, and wait there for me."

We went, Miss Soapsuds too, with her falsest black front and best bonnet. How I wanted to cut her in pieces with my tongue! If I were she, I'd be Paul Pry, and done with it. Cousin Filura was in the kitchen, pegging a mitten: *she'd* never think of intruding at such a time.

"Now," said my father, when he came into the dining-room, all smiles,—how could he smile?—"give me a cup of tea, and I'll tell you a story."

Then he said he went to Keller's boarding-house, but the landlady didn't know where Keller was; he had left the week before. So my father went to the school-buildings, and after a while Keller came to the door, looking rather scared.

"Young man," said my father, "I've come to look into your conduct. We received an extraordinary document from you. Where's your wife, you wretched boy?"

Keller turned very pale; but at last said, if my father

would go to such a street and such a number, he'd show her to him.

When they got to the right place, and went in, they saw Charlie Snow sitting with his leg on a cushion. Charlie is one of our Quinnebasset boys, lamed for life by a base-ball.

"Allow me to introduce my wife, sir," said Keller, trying to laugh.

Till then he had thought this was a great joke. They had borrowed a little printing press, and struck off the wedding cards, just for fun.

"Fun!" said my father; "the ridiculous young noddies!"

But they were so frightened and ashamed, when they heard what mischief it had made!

Keller has had the care of poor Charlie ever since they went to Exeter, though we didn't know it, and called him "little wife." Charlie's middle name is Brown; and Brownie, as it is now, couldn't afford to pay his board; so Keller thought they'd try and see if they could get along cheaper to hire a room and cook their own food. Keller had it all to do, of course, and it was quite a sacrifice. My father said it was the most beautiful thing the boy ever attempted, and quite touching. The reason of his not writing us about it was, that he was afraid mother would object to his trying to cook, and think he wasn't comfortable.

So thoughtful of his mother, the cruel creature! Well, if that isn't just like a boy! Pat you with one hand, and pinch you with the other!

My father said he tried his best to scold; but those

boys were so broken down, and Charlie cried so hard, he had to give it up.

O, isn't this a happy family? It seems as if the world were all rainbows, and trouble had poured itself into a hole in the ground. Mother is sitting up, hemming my new calico, just like anybody. Mr. Loring is in the parlor, looking as pleased as the rest of us; but then, as Pauline said once, "Little girls mustn't surmise."

Keller isn't coming home to work on the "heater piece," and I think my father has more hope of him.

God is very good. He would never have allowed Keller to behave so. I thought it didn't seem possible!

CHAPTER VIII.

A DREAM THAT WAS ALL A DREAM.

MISS O'NEIL went directly from Dr. Prescott's to the Reading Circle, of which she was a self-invited member. They were all talking about Keller.

"See what comes of bringing up children by the square rule," said Delia Liscom, who had been brought up in a country tavern, by no rule at all.

"Yes," said Mrs. Page, the hostess, mother of a sharp-featured youth, dubbed by the school-boys "Picked Evil," "Dr. Prescott is full of theories; but here is his son behaving even worse than mine."

Then all the young ladies and gentlemen began, with one accord, to throw out recollections of Keller's past misdeeds, till the poor boy was buried deep under a mound of obloquy. Miss O'Neil, coming in as the last shovelful was going on, was rather sorry to have to dig him out. She thought disgrace a good discipline for anybody — the innocent as well as the guilty; and Keller had never been a favorite of hers since his bold surmise that she "never had an offer in her life."

Still she was very glad of another opportunity to make a sensation. Yesterday she had startled the people with the story, that "Keller Linscott had married him

a dancing wife, like the daughters of Benjamin." Now she cried, shaking her new cap-strings, the color of winter butter, "Keller Linscott is going straight to the gallows, and ought to be hung in jeopardy. He isn't married, and did it to deceive me, the foolish Galathian, without a *squeam* of conscience! But I'll tell you what he *has* done; he has set up housekeeping, and is trying to ruin his father!"

When the truth was fairly understood, there was a great deal of laughing; and, in spite of Miss O'Neil's frown, the verdict seemed to be that the doctor's son was not such a very bad boy, after all. There were no more misdeeds related of him, though Mr. Loring's entrance would have prevented that at any rate, he being regarded as a particular friend of Keller's family.

This Reading Circle was a time-honored institution of Quinnebasset. Marian and Judith, having some literary aspirations, thought they ought to be members; but no one ever invited them to join.

"Troubled with youngness," said Robert, the big brother of twenty, looking down on little Judith with fatherly tenderness. "Never mind, dear; you'll outgrow it."

But Judith did mind. When the Circle met at Dr. Prescott's, she and Marian staid in the room, listening to the reading of Hyperion, and the paper called the Salmagundi, with the liveliest interest. What harm could they do, sitting there with their hands crossed? Why were they left out, when they had such a taste for writing, and Marian's Essay on Cain had been read in the Lyceum?

There was Delia Liscom, who never wrote at all.

Was it fair that she should go there, and do nothing but smile, and ask Mr. Loring to hold yarn for her?

"She is twenty-five, and has outgrown *her* youngness," said Marian, with biting sarcasm. "When we are twenty-five, Judith, we can go into any society, whether we're ornaments or not."

The very next day Marian was ashamed of this speech, for she saw reason to think Miss Delia a superior being. Thankful Works sent her to Mrs. Liscom's for some sage, and Delia, following her to the door, said, graciously,—

"How is your dear mother? I hope that funny joke of Keller's didn't make her worse. Do you and Pauline never leave her alone? Is that why you don't join our circle, Marian? Do come Thursday night; it meets here. And please, dear, write for the Salmagundi. They say your poetry is beautiful."

"No, indeed, Miss Liscom," said the blushing Marian, looking up at the sign-post, a sort of swinging gravestone, in honor of Delia's grandfather; "it is Judith who makes rhymes."

"Ah, you say that because you're so modest! Well, you and Judith put your bright heads together, and bring me a poem, there's a pair of darlings."

Hadn't the girls reason to consider Miss Delia a person of discernment? Wouldn't they write for her the very choicest thoughts of their brains?

Judith gave it as her opinion that she had charming manners, and people were wrong who thought she asked Mr. Loring to hold yarn for her any oftener than was absolutely necessary.

"It's not worth while her being very polite to Mr. Loring," said Marian, with a shrewd smile.

Judith looked up inquiringly.

"Well, there, Judith, your eyes are more brilliant than mine; but what good do they do?"

"Why, you don't mean Pauline?"

"No, I don't mean anything. My elder sister says little girls 'mustn't surmise.' But I dreamed last night that those wedding cards were printed over again, with her name and Mr. Loring's. And it was so droll, Judith! I saw her go away in a white satin dress, with red stockings, but never shed a tear! 'Well,' thought I, 'Now I can let my room and my clothes go to destruction, and no Pauline to molest or make me afraid!'"

"Why wouldn't that make a good poem?" said Judith, thoughtfully.

"While sweetly sleeping yesternight,
I saw my sister dressed in white."

"Capital! Only bring in satin and roses. Let me get my slate. What, have you thought of more so soon?"

"A satin dress of costly kind,
With rosy wreath and pearl entwined."

"Judith, you *are* a genius. How Pauline will laugh when she hears herself described! What of this? —

"So beautifully fair she seemed,
I thought it must be *then* I dreamed!"

Is that too sarcastic, Judith? Pauline is so dark she'd look shockingly in white satin."

“O, well, Marian, this is all a joke. Your rhyme does pretty well; but can’t you help counting on your fingers? Give me the pencil, please.

“ She stood not alone with blushing mien,
For by her side a youth was seen.”

“But is Mr. Loring a youth?” queried Marian.
“He’s as much as twenty-five.”

“Poetical license, child. ‘Young man’ would spoil the metre.”

“Quick! I’ve thought of something!” cried Marian, seizing the pencil.

“ His well-marked face had a piercing look,
And O, a nose with an eagle hook.”

“Why, Marian, everybody will know him in a minute. That mark on his face.”

“Well, all the better. Where would be the sport if ’twas only a fancy sketch. What’s your next line, Judith?”

“ He gazed with pride on his lady fair — ”

“Now wait, Jude; I’ll draw another portrait.

“ Whose forehead low and dark-brown hair — ”

“ Why, Marian!”

Taking the slate from her friend, Judith added, —

“ Were garlanded with leaves of green,
And breathed of rose and aubepine.”

“Why, Judith, you dressed the bride once. Why do you do it again? What in the world is aubepine?”

“French for hawthorn. I happened to see it in the dictionary. Don’t know as there’s any smell to it, though.

“ The words were said which bind for aye,
The lawyer bore his bride away.”

“ There, Judith, you've married them ; now it's my turn. How we'll make everybody laugh !

“ Ah, such a change within our house,
Down to our cat, that loves a mouse !
Yes, pussy felt the alteration
To be a great amelioration.
No one to box her ears, or tread
Upon her tail ; no, none to dread.
And cobwebs lingered like a brother,
Unspied by the failing eyes of mother.”

“ Why, Marian !”

“ Don't interrupt. No one will take this in earnest.

“ And O, the cake-board in disgrace,
With dried-up dough upon her face.”

“ There, Marian Prescott, you really must stop ! I cannot consent to such vulgarity. You might express it thus :—

“ And Neatness sighed, and pined away.”

“ Very well,” said the incorrigible Marian, adding,—

“ But Peace smiled on us every day,
And we were happy in our home ;
So glad no lawyer's wife would come
To scour the paint with nimble fingers,
Yet scold her sister when she lingers.”

“ Scouring paint ! Give me that pencil, Marian. I don't mind your being ironical, for I suppose Pauline can take a joke ; but do let us have more refinement, and come out of the kitchen.

“ But ah ! I dreamed, too soon awaking,
To find the vision slowly breaking,
To know that bright as life then seemed,
‘Twas all illusion, for I dreamed.”

“ There, Judith, you’ve wound that off gloriously. I confess your thoughts are loftier than mine. Now for a signature. I’ve been thinking of Kaween, out of Hiawatha, which means, ‘No, indeed.’ You see the object, Judith ? Everybody will be on the *qui vive* about this poem, and when we are asked if we know who wrote it, we can answer, ‘No, indeed.’ ”

“ Yes, yes, I see. ‘No, indeed,’ wrote it.”

“ I hope that wouldn’t be a lie,” said Marian, doubtfully. “ What think ? ”

“ No, only a subterfuge, which an author has a perfect right to use,” returned Judith, beginning to copy with Marian’s violet ink.

Delia Liscom seized upon the poem with avidity. She had just enough envy in her narrow soul to feel some pleasure in holding up the popular and well-beloved Pauline to ridicule.

Marian and Judith went to the Circle the next Thursday night with fluttering hearts, Marian wearing a blue merino, which buttoned at the back, and hardly reached down to the tops of her boots. Would the time ever come when she might wear a long dress ? Should she ever put a wrought collar on her neck, and not hear Pauline say, “A standing ruffle is more simple for a child ”? Marian did not call herself a child, and had no desire to be simple.

While Delia Liscom was reading the “Salmagundi,” she and Judith sat in the corner, looking intently at

the striped yarn carpet, which had the effect of rainbows straightened into line. For some reason, their Dream had a very different sound when read before a room full of such quiet and astonished-looking people. Miss Liscom had a singsong tone, and sometimes mis-called the words, and had to go over them a second time. This detracted so much from the effect, that Marian was afraid the audience would not see how witty that poem really was. No one seemed particularly amused, though at the close there was a general rustle, and a little laughing, in which Mr. Loring faintly joined.

Marian timidly looked at the wall-paper, with its pictures of a lady in a high-topped comb smelling a dry rose, and one of our remote forefathers dancing a reel; thence at the antique chairs and brass-nailed sofa,—till she came to Pauline, sitting not far from Mr. Loring, and looking most stiff and uncomfortable. She wore a smile, it is true, but a very unnatural one, which seemed to be “frozen on.”

“She doesn’t know how to take a joke,” thought Marian. “I’m really afraid her feelings are wounded.”

And then, with sudden force, came one of Marian’s afterthoughts. Had she done well to join Pauline’s name with Mr. Loring’s in such a public manner? What right had she to suppose they were engaged? Or, even if they were, was it a delicate and fitting thing for a little sister to parade the fact before the world?

More than this, the playful allusions to Pauline’s scolding,—would everybody know how to understand it? What if somebody, given, like the poetess herself,

to "surmising," should conclude that Pauline was a vixen? What if Mr. Loring should conclude so too? O, dear! if any trouble should arise between him and Pauline on account of that miserable Dream!

Pauline gave Miss O'Neil her arm that night, and politely escorted her to her own door. Mr. Loring went home alone. What did that mean?

"I always knew Delia Liscom was a coarse-minded girl," said Robert to the two friends, as he walked between them; "but I must say, I did not think her capable of reading such doggerel as that in her own house. Personal articles are not allowable in the Salmagundi. Have you any idea who wrote it?"

"No, indeed," said Judith, faintly.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTERTHOUGHTS.

Miss Tottenham

MARCH 20.

 LESS your heart, Miss Tottenham: you're getting to be a solid comfort. It is so pleasant to have some discreet person to speak one's mind to!

I see now I was over-persuaded by Delia Liscom, or I never should have written that poem. She need not have read it aloud! How could she—in her own house too? When I am as old as she, I hope I shall have more discretion. "But then," as Robert remarked, "Miss Liscom is certainly a coarse-minded woman."

That night I thought I would go directly to Pauline, and tell her the whole story. She had got home first, and was rolling her hair on leads.

"O, Pauline," said I; but when I saw her face, I stopped. She is very seldom angry—never, I believe, except with me; but now her eyes were coal-of-fire-y.

"So you and Judith have been putting your heads together to dream out doggerel," said she. O, I tell you, she has temper enough!

"You take a great deal for granted, Pauline; what makes you think it was Judith and I?"

“Because nobody else would have been so silly.”

There, wasn’t that cutting? Do you wonder the confession died on my tongue?

“Marian Prescott, you had no right to hold me up to ridicule. What has your sister ever said or done to you that justifies you in such heartless conduct?”

You see how seriously she took it, Miss Tottenham, standing there facing me like a judge. I felt like a criminal, and a very angry one too. I went to the mantel, and began to strike matches; but three went out before I could light my lamp. Should I deny or confess? Denial would be a lie, unless I translated or *nom de plume* “Kaween,” and said, “No, indeed;” and she had not asked a direct question yet.

“I must say, Marian, a girl of fourteen might have a little sense. You are always doing the most unheard-of things; just after that nonsense of Keller’s too! Why, child, we shall be the most notorious family in town!”

“O, yes; but you don’t blame Keller; you only blame me, now and forever. And you don’t know yet that I wrote the poem.”

“But you did write it, of course?”

“No, indeed!”

There, I had said it; and it felt exactly like a lie!

Pauline started back. “Why, Marian, you’re not in earnest! How queer you look! I can’t doubt your word; you are the last person who would stoop to deceive, but —”

Ah, she cut me then worse than she did before!

“I never was more astonished in my life. Why, if

you and Judith Willard didn't write that jingle, who did? Do you know?"

"No, *indeed*, Pauline!"

Then I took my lamp and rushed up stairs, leaving her in a perfect puzzle. The first thing I did was to wash my mouth with Windsor soap. "But what harm have I done?" said I. "I'm no worse than Dickens; he called himself Boz; and who ever blamed him for that?"

Still, I felt that dreadful consciousness which my father says is the true test of guilt. "A lie acts on the soul," he says, "like poison on the body." I believe it, for I felt corroded. I looked around for an antidote; but all I could find was the same thing right over and over: "Twas only a subterfuge. What's fair for Dickens is fair for me."

And in that way I contrived to get to sleep.

Well, it is all over now, and Pauline never so much as alludes to the Dream. She has fallen into one of her "sewing rages," and scarcely speaks. How should I feel to have her know that the Academy girls, who are not members of the Reading Circle, have those lines by heart, and that Oscaforia Jones called out to me, yesterday,—

"So beautifully fair you seem,
I think it must be now I dream!"

Delia Liscom cannot have betrayed us! What does she think of her word?

March 30. We need aunt Filura again. There is another cloud hanging over the house. This time it is Pauline. I don't mean that she hangs over the house,

but something hangs over her. I never should have thought of it, if Thankful hadn't said, in a mysterious tone, "Ah, well, if your sister knew as much as I do of mankind, she wóuldn't take these things so to heart."

"What things?"

Thankful eyed me through those brass bows of hers, and saw, perhaps, that she was telling me something new; for she changed the subject at once, and went to talking about the "mysterious dispensations of marriage and death;" about Josiah's being a "drinking man," and leaving her "a widow so, with not much of anything to lay her hands to, for he willed away the property to *his* folks."

I've heard the story so often that I'm rather tired of it. But what she means about Pauline I can't imagine, and I'm determined to find out. I would so like to talk with mother! but my father says she must not be agitated. Since Keller's joke failed to destroy her, he hopes we'll stop experimenting.

I am in the sitting-room, studying my geology lesson, off and on, by the German-student lamp; and mother and Pauline, before the fire, are talking about it's getting too late in the season for buckwheat cakes. Nothing very solemn in that; and I don't see, for my part, but Pauline looks lively enough. As the light falls on her eyes, they are a pansy-purple mixed with cinnamon-brown. I could envy her her eyes; but such splendors are not for me; I must do with my old gray. Isn't it hard always to content ourselves with inferior things, when we know what is so much better?

Here comes my father, chilled through and through. "Benjamin, my son, put my boots behind the kitchen

stove to dry, and bring me my slippers." He looks rather withering; but I know that look is for Mrs. Page, not Benjie. Pauline wheels his big arm-chair before the fire, and mother hands him his dressing-gown. "Poh, poh! I can wait on myself," says he; but he smiles at mother as if she were an angel, and had brought him an ascension robe.

"How did you find Mrs. Page?" said I; for I knew he wanted a chance to scold.

"Humph! you needn't hurry up her epitaph, my daughter; if that's what you're doing! I judge her case isn't critical. I only remarked some degree of inflammation about the lachrymal glands."

Just then Benjie cried out, from the bay-window, "A man a drivin' round to the porch door."

"Another case of spleen, most likely!" growled my father. "Bad roads and stormy weather develop the symptoms."

But it happened this time that a Mr. Works, of Poonoosac, had broken his skull or his back-bone. So, though the wind howled like wolves, my father hurried into his wet boots, harnessed his horse, and was off before Thankful had time to ask if the patient wasn't "one of Josiah's folks, that lived on the flat."

My father is all alive in a surgical case; but as for nervousness—well, he doesn't think anybody has a right to nerves but just mother.

There, now I've been out in the kitchen talking to Thankful. "Please tell me this minute," said I, "what you mean by 'these things!'"

"O, I was only speaking in a general way of the fickleness of men," said Thankful, putting on another

cape. She wears one all the time, and two when she's preparing to cry. And then I had to hear it all over again — the history of her wrongs. My father calls it "Memoir of Josiah, with Epitaph and Appendix." I suppose this is the Appendix: "I never shall marry again; no, never! I hate the whole race of mankind!" I'm glad to know for a dead certainty that Thankful won't leave us; and I can generally worry through the Memoir for the sake of the Appendix. But not now. "Thankful," said I, "please do let Josiah rest in his grave, and answer my question."

Finally, after charging me over and over "not to let this go from *her*," she told me "the story was, that the engagement was broken between Pauline and Mr. Loring, and Delia Liscom was somehow to blame."

"There, if Quinnebasset isn't just like a glass house to live in," said I; "only the glass is smoked this time, and they don't see straight. Pauline was never engaged, for she told me so herself. And as for Mr. Loring's staying away from here, why shouldn't he, when they've stopped German? You needn't look so wise, Thankful Works! She wants the time to practise; and haven't I heard you say how much pleasanter it makes your evenings out here in the kitchen, when you can hear her sing and play?"

If there is anything I dislike in Thankful, it is her way of not answering you, but looking as if she held back a whole volume behind her spectacles.

I wish she had not made me so uncomfortable. Can it be that I have done any harm? — In dreaming aloud, for instance? That foolish satire cannot have changed Mr. Loring's opinion of my dear sister. No;

for it is Pauline herself who seems to wish him not to come. I supposed she was tired of German. The first time I met him at the door, and told him she was out, and wouldn't be home till nine o'clock, he looked surprised, and I dare say thought her rather impolite. He called three times, and she was always out; and since that he does not come any more. I was very glad of it till now, for I thought Pauline was glad; but if she isn't, it is quite another thing. That poisoned feeling comes over me very strongly. Why didn't I tell Pauline the simple, silly truth? Then she would not have made this miserable mistake. I see it all now, and might have foreseen it. She suspects Mr. Loring himself of writing that poem. What shall I do? what shall I do?

CHAPTER X.

THANKFUL'S THIRDS.



HEN Dr. Prescott returned at a late hour from Poonoosac, he found Thankful waiting up for him, and keeping some ginger tea hot upon the stove.

"You need something after such a hard ride, and Mrs. Prescott was stren-oo-ous about my sitting up," said she, in a deprecating tone, for she stood a little in awe of the head of the family.

The doctor thanked her heartily, but could not avoid one of his half-satirical smiles, as he met the widow's sombre black eyes through the "green gloom" of a pair of round spectacles. She had just finished toeing off a stocking, and her hair was charged with knitting-needles. As usual, her clean calico dress had retired from this dirty world under various concealments. A blue checked apron covered the skirt; baggy brown "leggings" the sleeves; and the waist was well hidden under a merino cape, made of small black "scrids," pieced "askew," and edged with rabbits' fur. So grotesque was Widow Works's general appearance, at home and abroad, that she was suspected by the villagers of being a little "flared." When asked why she did not dress like other people, she had been

known to reply that she never intended to marry again, and "did not wish to hold out any inducements to gentlemen."

"Doctor," said she, rising and pouring a mugful of foaming tea, made by a private recipe of her own, and famous throughout the neighborhood, "which one of the Workses was it? And did he get much hurt?"

"It was James Works," replied the doctor, drinking the delicious beverage with a relish; "he fell from a wagon, and broke his collar-bone."

"O, was that all?"

"You don't wish it had been worse, I hope? You think he treated you unfairly, I believe, at the time of your husband's death?"

"I know he did, doctor! You see, the heft of the property—"

"Yes, yes, I understand. But did you ever ask James Works to make it a matter of conscience? Did you talk to him plainly?"

"Did I, sir? You shall see," replied the widow, a bitter look darkening her eyes; and going up stairs she quickly returned with a well-worn sheet of foolscap. "This is the copy of a letter I wrote James Works; and I leave you to judge whether I was mealy-mouthed, sir," said she, giving the doctor the paper triumphantly, as one who should say, "Here's eloquence!"

The doctor read it aloud:—

"JAMES WORKS. Sir: Indignation concerning the will of Josiah Works still burns in the bosom of myself, the Hights of Poonoosac, and the Lowes of Quin-

nebasset. We all know you took advantage of his habits to get him to will away my thirds. Is there any punishment for such outrageous conduct, or must we wait till the day of judgment to have every man rewarded according to his deeds? I expect you to give me back my thirds; and the longer you delay, the smaller you look to yours,

THANKFUL WORKS."

"That's strong," laughed the doctor. "But, as James was not moved by it, why didn't you break the will?"

"Break the will?" repeated Thankful, with a revengeful glance at the ginger tea. "My feelings wouldn't allow that, doctor. I had too much respect for the dead."

"Humph! Better break a will than hold a grudge! But let me say this to you, my good woman. If James Works has used you ill,—as I do not doubt he has,—it is safe to forgive him now."

"Goodness sakes alive, doctor! You don't mean he's going to die?"

"I cannot tell. He has met with serious internal injuries, poor fellow. Time will determine."

"Dear, dear, dear!" cried the widow, with clasped hands and quivering knitting-needles. "Don't think I'm a heathen, doctor, if I did write that letter. If James is going to die, I forgive him out and out."

"But if he should get well, what then?" laughed the doctor, in his short, dry way; and, bidding the weeping widow good night, he passed into the sitting-room, to see if the fire was properly raked. To his

surprise, Marian stood leaning over the mantel, sobbing bitterly.

“Why, daughter, little daughter, what is it?”

The very slight touch of sarcasm which Thankful had unconsciously felt in his voice was gone now, and in its place was such affectionate tenderness that Marian threw herself right into his arms.

“O, papa, I’m so discouraged, so tired of trying to do right! What do you suppose I was born for?”

“Bless us, how the little heart quivers! Born for? Why, to be a noble, high-minded woman, when the time comes, and a blessing all the way along.”

“But I can’t; O, I can’t, papa!”

“But you are, dear.”

“No, no, papa; how can I be a blessing when I’ve—I don’t know but I’ve broken somebody’s heart.”

“Somebody’s heart, child?”

“Yes; it was not an engagement, it is true,” sobbed Marian; “not quite; but it would have been, I really think, if I— Well, there, papa, it is such a very foolish thing to tell.”

The doctor looked hard at the young creature, whose small, soft face was bowed with such a weight of woe upon his arm.

“What is my baby saying about engagements? I can’t have heard you clearly; I don’t understand.”

“I mean Mr. Loring; and it was my way of doing unheard-of things that made a coolness, papa. ‘No discretion, and no delicacy,’ Pauline says; and I could bear it better to hear her say so, if it wasn’t true.”

“There, there, don’t sob so hard, my child. Indiscreet you may be; but papa will not own that his little



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girl has no delicacy. Begin at the beginning, Marian, and tell me what has happened."

Thus encouraged, Marian related the whole story of the foolish poem, not omitting the "subterfuge," though at that her father was a little startled, prevarication being by no means one of her besetting sins.

"And I really thought, papa, Pauline suspected Mr. Loring."

The doctor smiled quietly.

"So, after a long struggle, I went to her this evening, and told her the truth. And, what do you think? She only laughed in my face. 'As if she could suspect a sensible man of scratching such doggerel!' she said. And I know she never did; it really was too silly, papa. But if that isn't the trouble, what is it? Why does she treat him so, then?"

"There's no accounting for young people's freaks. I fancy she may be a little ashamed of being the butt of ridicule. That is probably the amount of it," said the doctor, thoughtfully.

"But Mr. Loring used to come here so free and easy, just like one of the family. Do you suppose that's all over now?"

"I cannot say? It's not our affair."

"But it is my affair. I did it!" cried Marian. "I'd go through fire and water to undo it. I'll run right over to Judge Davenport's, and see Mr. Loring."

"There, that will answer. Don't you perceive, Marian, it is your very impulsiveness which has made all the mischief? Wait, now, and let affairs take their course."

"But isn't there anything I can do?"

"Nothing, child. Stop doing."

"But Pauline?"

"Pauline is her own mistress. If I understand the case, she has behaved quite as foolishly as our little poetaster herself."

Marian looked up in astonishment.

"Why, mother says Pauline has an exquisite sense of propriety, and you always call her your 'proper child.'"

"There is such a thing as being too proper."

"Ah, that doesn't mean me! I hope I didn't do wrong in telling you, papa. Why is it I always come to you with everything, when Pauline and Keller don't dare?"

A pained expression crossed the doctor's firm mouth; but Marian did not observe it.

"I fancy you're a magnet, papa, and I am steel, and they are oxidized iron; isn't that it?"

"We won't sit up to discuss chemistry," said the doctor, somewhat sharply. "Go to bed, child, and don't brood over this nonsense. To change the subject, though, I will tell you a word about Thankful; but mind you keep it to yourself now."

Marian smiled as she smoothed the thin, fair hair from her father's forehead. How much better he understood her than Pauline did, who so seldom trusted her with a secret!

"I was called to-night to see James Works, her brother-in-law. I think he will die. I found him frightened and penitent. He inquired for Thankful, and owned he hadn't treated her fairly. I told him there was still time to do works meet for repentance,

and urged him to make a will, restoring her thirds; and I am pretty sure he will do it."

"How much do her thirds amount to?"

"Some three thousand dollars, more or less."

"Why, father, if Thankful gets as much money as that, she won't be obliged to do housework."

"No, perhaps not."

"O, dear! and she is such a capital cook. Just the best help we ever had, and no fault but talking so much about Josiah. I don't see, father, how we can ever let her go."

"Selfish little tyrant!" said the doctor, pinching Marian's upturned chin, one of the loveliest ever tickled by a dimple. "Would you have had me consider our own convenience, before I counselled James Works to do his duty?"

"No, sir; O, no," said Marian, blushing. "I didn't mean that! Only, you know, if mother and I *should* go to Cuba —"

"Mother and I," laughed the doctor. "Go to bed, child."

CHAPTER XI.

CUBA PREVAILS.

T was a late, cold spring. There was the usual panic, at Quinnebasset, lest the ice, when it went out, should take the bridge with it; but it had not strength enough, and the bridge was left yet a little longer to shake under every wagon that passed over it.

Nothing very important occurred in town. Mr. Willard continued to keep the principal store on the north side of the river, and aunt Esther to practise economy in his family. Judith, being "at the growing age," and quite averse to general housework, slipped off at every opportunity to revel in poetry or novels.

Robert worked hard at copying deeds in the Registry. His father had never sent him away to school for a single term; but the youth might have struck out for himself, and would have done so, only that Mr. Willard, taking counsel of aunt Esther, declared he could not give his boys their time; they must contribute to the family support till they were twenty-one. Robert continued, however, to glean knowledge under difficulties. Slow, diligent, and persevering, his mind, as Dr. Prescott said, admiringly, was constructed like a sheep's jaws; it could pick up its living off a rock.

Little Benjie would think it hardly correct to say nothing of importance was occurring in town. Miss O'Neil had put him into geography, and he had learned that Newfoundland is south-east of Florida. And so it was, on his small map, having been crowded out of its proper place. Considering this surprising information, his parents decided to take him out of school before his ideas of locality should become hopelessly twisted. Benjie was ecstatic, and Miss O'Neil easily consoled for the loss of her pupil by the gift of a barrel of flour and an infuriated crimson head-dress, which Keller had selected, with his usual taste, at a milliner's shop in Boston. To be sure, Miss O'Neil scorned the head-dress; but it gave her something to scold about and pick to pieces, and so added not a little to her scanty fund of happiness.

Keller came home the last of July, with fragile little Charlie Snow; but looked so mortified when asked "if this was a bridal tour," that it was evident he was ashamed of the joke. "A fellow can't have any peace," said he aside to Robert, "they take you up so on every little thing. Look here, Bob; on the square now, what did O'Neil mean by rolling her eyes, on the church steps, and saying, 'A horse is a vain thing for safety, O you foolish Galathian'?"

"Why, you looked rather too jolly, I dare say, going by her window on horseback. Poor O'Neil can't bear enjoyment in other people; that's one of her amiable weaknesses, you know."

"Was that all? Good for her! You see, Bob, I was afraid she meant something else. There was an old dry-bones of a parson let out his old dry-bones of a

horse to feed near the school buildings ; and, to refresh the poor beast, some of us fellows dabbed him all over with brown paint. He was sorrel to begin with, and when he came out speckled, the parson didn't seem to recognize him. He hunted round and round all day, and the exercise was a fine thing for him ; but somehow he couldn't find the horse. We fellows offered to assist ; and, I tell you, we scoured that town well. When we'd used our legs up, we made use of turpentine, and that found the horse. 'Twas too late, though, for the parson to meet an engagement ; and there was a while we shook in our boots, for he turned out to be one of your big guns, and—"

"Going gunning, boys ? What are you laughing at ?" said Marian, coming into the room with her apron full of wild flowers.

"Nothing. Bob laughs if you only point your finger at him," said Keller, giving him a poke in the side. "By the way, Marian," — Keller was always saying "by the way," — "what's up with Mr. Loring, that he doesn't come here now ?"

"He was here week before last," returned Marian, avoiding Robert's eye — for what he thought of the matter she did not know. "He came two or three times to read to me when I had the roseola."

"Measles, that is. All right," said Keller, carelessly ; "only I thought he and Pauline were great friends last I heard of them."

"See, Robert," exclaimed Marian, with sudden enthusiasm, "how my ivy grows. Two years old, and it has crept twenty feet, shouldn't you say ? From the bay-window to the looking-glass."

"Just to see itself, hey? Vain thing!" said Keller, looking not at the "vain thing," but at his own reflection in the large mirror between the windows. "What was I trying to say? O, 'Picked Evil' told me some kind of a yarn about Thankful's having money fall to her. It isn't true, of course?"

"Yes, but it is. Her brother-in-law died, and left her those 'thirds' you've heard so much about. But she chooses to stay here all the same. She never will marry again, Keller; three thousand dollars don't change her views of mankind," said Marian, laughing lightly, as she gave the last touches to a vase of nodding harebells, bittersweet, and clematis, and flitted out of the room to shake her apron.

"I'm glad to hear of that windfall; 'twill be nice to borrow of the old girl when a fellow's hard up," remarked Keller, stretching his length across two chairs.

Robert looked at him keenly.

"You lazy, good-for-nothing boy; if you're hard up again, I'll report you."

"You don't scare me that way, Bob. Old Slyboots Loring reported me, but I'll risk you. By the way, wasn't it lucky Marian didn't get hold of that story of the painted horse? If it had been Pauline, I wouldn't have cared."

"Why, that's queer," said Robert, "when Pauline is so fastidious, and Marian is running all over with fun."

"That shows how much you know of my two sisters, sir. Pauline's a real comfort to a fellow; but Marian is too sharp-cornered to suit me."

"Well, there's no accounting for the different effects the same temperaments have on different people," said

Robert, wonderingly. "Now, I'm just a little afraid of Pauline; but I can say anything under the sun to Marian."

"Can you? Why, I'm sure she hasn't any particular fancy for you," said Keller, bluntly.

"I wasn't talking about fancies," returned Robert, slightly annoyed.

"No, but I was; and I have a real one for you, Bob, I suppose you know. If anybody can do me the least good, it's you."

"That 'if' was well put in. How do you stand in your class, my boy?"

"Well, 'he that is low need fear no fall;' so I manage to keep as near the foot as I can," replied Keller, examining the heel of his boot with some confusion. "You know I always hated to study."

"Study? Why, you never did it yet. Look at a lesson, and you have it."

"I know that; so, you see, I always put off looking at it till the last minute; that's what's the matter," said Keller, with a very complacent, good-natured laugh.

"Shame on you!" cried Robert, indignantly. "Pluming yourself on being quicker to learn than other boys! Why don't you know more, then?"

"Probably should, if I had to dig for it as you do, Bob."

"I believe you. It's this 'fatal facility' that threatens to be the ruin of you," said Robert, shaking his great, shaggy head, and looking down compassionately, from his five feet eleven, upon the handsome young scatter-brains before him.

“‘Fatal facility!’ I’ll make a note of that. Let’s see; here’s mother’s motto in my pocket-book: ‘Think that to-day shall never dawn again.’ Who wants it to? I say. Better days coming—worth two of this. Marian has the same motto. She and I are very much alike, you know—what you call geniuses; no regulation to us.”

Robert shook his head again, this time very decidedly. That there was “no regulation” to Keller he admitted. A screw seemed to be loose somewhere, which he feared would never tighten. But as for Marian, he saw nothing amiss in her; she was merely impulsive, effervescent. All she needed was the “sweet benefit of time” to mature her into a superior woman.

“Well, Keller, if you make excuses for all your shortcomings by calling yourself a genius, I’ve nothing more to say. You’ve put me out of all patience. Good by.”

Keller only laughed. Bob’s losing his patience was nothing. He always did lose it, more or less, after any serious talk with Keller; but then he was just as magnanimous without patience as other people are with it; just as ready to do you a kindness, overlook your faults, and keep all unpleasant particulars to himself.

“Splendid old Bob! Pity he’s such a whale! What a figure he’d make as a lawyer! ‘Fatal facility.’ Yes, I’ve known it ever since that hit on the interred-with-your-bones question. I own up to the ‘facility,’ but where does the ‘fatal’ come in, hey? By the way, I’m going out to stir up Thankful. She hates mankind, but she always brightens up when she sees me

coming. Glad of her windfall. Glad for her sake, I mean. Don't I know how it feels to be without money? Yes, and the governor so everlasting particular, down to half a red cent. Wonder if the old girl would like to lend a fellow something, on good security?"

Miss Tottenham.

September 3. Fifteen to-day. A birth-night supper, as usual; but how could I enjoy it, with the whole Island of Cuba pressing upon my heart? It has been up with mother, and down with Cuba, or *vice versa*, for two years. Now up comes Cuba, and prevails. I am not the one to go; the choice falls on Pauline. I am to be left at home with the dropping autumn leaves. Heigh-ho!

Dear mamma seems no worse than usual. I must hope my father is needlessly alarmed. She walks about the house and grounds, and sits in the summer-house in the sun, looking wonderfully happy, as if she were resting in God's arms. How beautiful that is! Seemis to me most Christians cling to him feebly, just with one finger; but mother lies close to his breast. She says she is quite sure she shall come back, in a few months, strong and well. She laughs and talks, and seems to like to have us all enjoy ourselves. She made my Italian creams with her own hands, and thought out the words for our charades. I had Robert and Judith, Oscaforia and Pitkin Jones, and half a dozen others. I told Robert I should be delighted to see Mr. Loring, my darling old teacher, if we weren't all too young. Robert said nothing, but went right

off and invited him on his own responsibility. I think the man was pleased to come; and, as for Pauline—well, I have a page to tell about that.

All would have passed off finely if Miss O'Neil hadn't appeared. She saw the lights, she said, and "heard the verbal music,"—that was Marie Smith, singing operatic,—and concluded to drop in, "for she always thought everything of our family." Talk about a man's house being his castle! I'd like to see the castle walls Miss O'Neil wouldn't scale! Yet she is well bred too, in her way, only the politeness never struck in. I begged Mr. Loring to tell a story about something that happened to him in Germany; but Miss O'Neil filled all the pauses by scolding Benjie because some other boys had jumped in the little speck of a grass-plot before her front door. She cuts that grass with a pair of scissors, and makes a bed for her cat. Poor little Benjie thought a great deal of sitting up for the first time through my birth-night party; but Miss O'Neil got him fairly exasperated at last, and he ran round the room hooting like a little *scream-engine*. I had to coax him out, and pacify him with jelly-cake. We tried "How do you like it?" But Miss O'Neil threw us into the greatest confusion. When the word was "hair," she "liked it on humans and inhumans;" when it was a waiter, she "liked it up a stove-pipe." Mr. Loring told her nobody ever heard of a waiter up a stove-pipe. "Of course not; that was the funny part of it," she said. But afterwards she helped us to the words in plain—Irish. Well, everybody knows what a fool she is; so what do I care?

I had a set of Mrs. Browning from Robert, and a set

of turquoise from Keller. Lovely as the sky; but the boy can't possibly afford it—I mean Keller. And then that dear Mr. Loring—

Hark! The clock strikes eleven. I am tempted not to mind it. I so long to sit up and tell the whole story, and let a ghost walk through it—the ghost I saw to-night. I might, for no one knows when I go to bed. But my father, when he insisted on our all having separate chambers, wished us to make it a matter of conscience not to sit up late. So, good night, Miss Tottenham.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS O'NEIL EXPRESSES HER MIND.

Miss Tottenham.

SEPTEMBER 5.

 MIGHT just as well have finished the story on my birth-night for all the sleep I got.

“My soul kept up too much light
Under my eyelids for the night.”

And it is not to be wondered at when you consider the circumstances. In the first place, I don't quite enjoy entertaining company with Pauline looking on. When she handed iced creams I followed with pickles, thinking, to be sure, it was cake. Miss O'Neil says I “learned behavior at her school;” and alas! I begin to think I did. I'm at the disagreeable age, Miss Tottenham, and I feel it. It is not the fault of my dear mother,—this hit-or-miss-ness,—for she has spared no pains in trying to make me a true lady. Do you suppose there's anything in the dispensary to stop my blushing? I wouldn't mind doing it properly, like Pauline. A little rosy flush, that comes and goes, is nice and becoming; but blushing all over gives you the appearance of measles! I never saw it done except by me. It's “neck or nothing,” and arms too; so,

from a child, I've always objected to wearing short sleeves.

Well, I will try to tell the events of the evening, as they occurred. I begged for mother's company, and she sat out most of the charades. We had them in the dining-room, and Silas Hackett officiated. He has some talent for acting, though it is chiefly in low comedy, and some of the scenes were rather too boisterous for the good of the furniture.

They were all impromptu affairs; but the drollest was "Artemus Ward." It shocked cousin Sarah Hinsdale and Pauline, though they were too polite to give expression to their feelings. The fourth syllable was a ward in a soldiers' hospital, with men lying around in little cot-beds, groaning in the liveliest manner. You could not help laughing, for all it reminded you so terribly of the real thing. Miss O'Neil *would* appear as one of the nurses, carrying about a bowl of gruel, and scolding like aunt Hinsdale's parrot. She was just as disagreeable and contrary as if the men had been actually sick, and her growls kept the actors in such a state that they could scarcely speak for laughing. Silas Hackett was the surgeon, and sawed off Pitkin Jones's leg beautifully. "You never told me you were going to do that, Cyrus! Legs are very improper!" And when it fell to the floor with a loud noise, she informed the audience it was only a stick of wood, for she could see the end of it through the top of the boot.

Mother found all this rather fatiguing, and presently slipped out of the room without saying anything. Whereupon Miss O'Neil came up to me, as I stood

by one of the windows, talking with Mr. Loring and Oscaforia, and said, as if it were the best news in the world,—

“Miriam, your mother is failing fast.”

“O, no, ma'am; I hope not!”

“Yes, she is, too. Everybody sees it but just your family.”

I looked at Mr Loring, but he was watching the new moon; and then at Oscaforia, but she was playing with her fan. I could not catch their eyes.

“I never saw such singular people,” added Miss O’Neil, in that angry tone of hers, as if she were representing an insult. “You wouldn’t be thought anything of at Machias—a girl that has parties in her mother’s last days!”

Mother’s last days! A strange sensation came over me, like choking,—and like wanting to choke Miss O’Neil too. What right had she to push herself into my house, and talk to me so?

“Miss O’Neil,” said I, determined to frown her down,—for I wouldn’t have her see a tear in my eye for the world,—“you are quite mistaken in what you say of my mother. But really, ma’am, if I saw things as you do, and thought people had parties at improper times, it *seems* to me I would stay away, especially when I wasn’t invited.”

There, I knew that was very rude, and would make her hate me worse than ever; but I declare I couldn’t help it. Mr. Loring smiled at the moon, and Oscaforia looked as shocked as her exquisite manners will allow; but Miss Pry didn’t wince.

“Miriam Linscott, I’m a particular friend of your

mother's, and don't stand on ceremony in her house. But I must say this: if I have my senses when *I* am buried, I hope nobody will follow me to *my* grave with such actions as you've had here to-night."

Mr. Loring turned round from the window quite exasperated, just as I have seen him sometimes when the school-boys were playing behind his back.

"Miss O'Neil, I beg you, for Miss Marian's sake, to choose some other topic of conversation. Mrs. Prescott has just been pouring coffee for us; and here you speak of her as if she were at the point of death. It is really too absurd!"

Miss O'Neil fixed her two round eyes on Mr. Loring with great severity.

"Mr. Lovell," said she, "did you ever have a mother?"

The question was so unexpected that Oscaforia couldn't manage her mouth—it danced right up; but Mr. Loring answered, seriously,—

"Yes, madam, I am happy to say—"

"Then," said Miss O'Neil, "I wonder you don't see how proper it is that Miriam should be prepared for the worst. Mrs. Linscott's death may be momentary—who knows? She poured out the coffee just now; but what of that? So did Judge Dillingham's father,—I mean shaved himself,—and leaned right back and died."

"Let me go!" I cried, darting out between Mr. Loring and Oscaforia, and rushing to the bay-window. It seemed as if I must have air or die. Robert stood there, examining some queer stones I had put at the foot of my calla lily.

“Why, Marian, what is it?” said he.

“Hush, Robert; I can’t bear a word!”

He saw I wanted to get out of sight of everybody, and he did just what I should have asked of him if I had only thought of it,—brought me an ottoman, and then stood with his back between me and the light. In that way I had a chance to collect my thoughts.

What did Miss O’Neil mean? She is very nearly a fool; still she does hit the truth sometimes. Let people drop remarks, and she is sure to pick them up

“as pigeons peas,
And utter them again as God may please.”

You can generally tell through her what is talked of in the neighborhood.

“Robert, come up to me, and speak very low. What are people saying about my mother?”

He did not answer at once, and then it was only by asking a question.

“Why do you care what people say? They can only judge from appearances. They know nothing of the case.”

“O, Robert, you are putting me off! Tell me what you think yourself?”

“I, Marian?”

“Yes, *you*. Your opinion is next as good as my father’s. You are going to be a physician some time, and you are always looking into things through a microscope. Tell me quick what you think.”

“I think your mother is very delicate indeed, with a strong tendency —”

“There, Robert Willard, you are enough to provoke

a saint ! Talking about my mother as if she were common flesh and blood, and as far off as Botany Bay ! You think she will come home strong and well. Say so this minute ! ”

“ I hope so.”

“ Say you think so ! Say you know so ! If you let her die, Robert Willard, if you and my father let her die, I'll never forgive you as long as I live ! ”

“ Hush, Marian ! You talk too loud. Let us go into the garden.”

It was well he thought of that. I stepped out, and he followed, but left me a minute to go for a glass of water. I never felt so before — as if all out-of-doors wasn't wide enough to breathe in. But drinking some water, and having my face bathed with it, relieved me a little.

“ Now, Marian,” said Robert, very sternly, “ if you will control yourself, and behave like a woman, I will talk to you — otherwise not.”

It was a strange way for Robert to speak, and it surprised and hurt me so that I was on my dignity in a moment.

“ Yes, I'll behave like a woman ; like one that's cut out of stone. Speak, and tell me my mother is going to die. Make believe I don't care any more about it than you would if it were your mother, you know.”

I cannot tell what made me say such a cruel thing, for even as I spoke a picture flashed up before me of Robert drawing pale Mrs. Willard in a sedan chair, and turning around to toss violets into her lap. She always chose him to wait on her rather than her husband, and he often carried her in his arms, like a baby.

Robert was a loving son to his sick mother, and he will mourn for her as long as he lives. He had a right to be very angry at my remark, but I doubt if he heard it; at any rate, he paid no attention to it.

"You know, of course, Marian, that your mother is very feeble; but I do really think there is strong hope of her getting well."

"O, Robert, you good old Robert; bless you and thank you for that!"

He laughed, and gave me another drink of water.

"What I say is nothing original. I only quote from your father."

"Well, that's enough. You and my father cannot both be wrong."

"But, Marian, to be frank with you, most people think your mother's case is hopeless,—Dr. Ware into the bargain."

"Dr. Ware! He hasn't any more feeling than a stone wall. I should think he would be ashamed to give anybody up in that off-hand way! Why, it's outrageous!"

"Yet it must be owned the case is a critical one. I wonder you cannot see that for yourself, Marian. Have you never been anxious about your mother?"

"No; that is, not really. She always seems so happy, how could I?"

"That is it. You were right in saying she isn't common flesh and blood. And, Marian, there is just where the hope lies. It is your high-hearted people that outlive what would kill the timid ones. Now, her chest—"

"There, don't say it. It makes me faint to hear

about people's organs. You and my father think she is going to get well—”

“*Hope!*”

“Yes, and that is all I want to know. Shake hands with me, Robert, and tell me you forgive me for calling you cold-hearted. I didn't mean any such thing.”

I suppose I must have been very pale, for when we stepped in at the bay-window, Judith cried out, “You're fainting away; you're fainting away!” And there would have been a scene in no time if Robert hadn't put a stop to it. He has so much common sense; there's the beauty of Robert.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE.

Miss Tottenham.

SEPTEMBER 5.

HE room seemed to be full of life and gayety, and it chilled me all over to hear the girls laugh—the very girls who had made up their minds mother was going to die.

“Very well,” thought I; “let them enjoy themselves. I’ll stay here in the corner. I shan’t be missed.” And there I stood, feeling “as alone as Lyra in the sky,” with the dreary lonesomeness of mother gone to Cuba, and behind that the very abomination of desolation—mother gone to heaven.

While I sniffed at the heliotrope, not caring a straw for politeness, Pauline came along, and gave me such a look! It was as good as a small-sized book of etiquette. I answered her aloud, “Yes, I’ll come in a minute.”

Pauline wouldn’t forget her manners on the way to the scaffold. She would shake out the folds of her dress, and hold up her head like a lady, with what the girls call “a good *do* on her back hair.” But, before I had time to obey her, Mr. Loring came up to us, saying,—

"Will you allow me, Miss Marian? We have been playing, 'What is my thought like?' and my thought was *you*. Now, why was my thought like this, should you say?"

It was a half-open blush rose — blushing all over; a very proper way for a *rose*!

"O, how beautiful!" I cried; and was just going to inhale its fragrance, when Mr. Loring laughed, and shut down a glass case over it, which was pantomime for saying, "Hands off! Noses off! Done in wax!" Then I enjoyed it a second time as a work of art, absolutely perfect, even to the tiny prickles on the stem. I don't know whether Pitkin Jones meant anything hateful or not, when he said,—

"A rosebud set with little wilful thorns."

Pitkin is famous for quoting poetry. And I enjoyed it a third time as a present from dear Mr. Loring, on what he calls my sixteenth birthday. I thanked him over and over for the rose; but one of the thanks, though he did not know it, was for setting me ahead a year. I liked his calling it my sixteenth birthday.

"Mr. Loring, I don't see why she is like a rosebud," said Robert, with a mischievous glance at my hair. "If you had said a dandelion now!"

"Or a leaf of Turkish tobacco," said Silas Hackett; "that is nearer the color."

I was glad to laugh, for Mr. Loring's talk about the "rosebud garden of girls" was rather embarrassing, and I did not know what to say.

But that "respectable, aged, and indignant female," as Silas Hackett calls Miss O'Neil, had scented the

rose from afar, and came up now to see how she could make herself disagreeable.

"That's a beautiful wax image, Mr. Lovell. I hope you didn't give it to Miriam Linscott?"

"I did."

"Indeed! And Mrs. Linscott not here to speak for herself! Miriam, does your mother, a Christian woman, allow you to receive presents from gentlemen?"

I thought how ashamed I should be to blush at such a speech as that; so of course I blushed.

"Mother will be charmed with it, I am sure," said Pauline, kindly coming to the rescue. "See, Miss O'Neil, how perfect the petals are!"

Miss O'Neil glowered at the rose, and then at Mr. Loring.

"Foolish Galathian," said she; "why didn't you give it to Paulina?"

If she had been trying to make a sensation, she made it that time; you could feel it in the air.

"O, yes, you needn't tell me," said she, smoothing down her apron. "The time was when you'd have given it to Paulina, and been glad to; and you would now, if that little dancing daughter of Benjamin hadn't stood in the way, writing verses that I've heard with my own lips, and not a word of truth ever came out of them yet. What makes you smile, Cyrus Hackett? I'm very intimate in this family, and how could she have a white satin dress and I not know it?"

"How, indeed? I defy her to do it," said Silas, so solemnly that everybody laughed, even Pauline.

"And you've been under a *halluzion* of mind, Mr.

Lovell, if you think Paulina Linscott scolds. She's no more of a scold than I am. I wish you'd talked with *me* before you gave Miriam that rose. It was just what she wrote the poem for, as I could have told you. And, if you're a gentleman, you'll ask Paulina Linscott's pardon for doing it."

For doing what? I'll leave it to you, Miss Tottenham, if that speech wasn't ridiculous enough to approach the sublime. Everybody heard it too, for her tone was as sharp as boxing your ears. And, in the midst of the laughing, Mr. Loring stepped up to Pauline, holding out his hand, and said,—

"Miss O'Neil bids me beg your pardon. Will you grant it, Miss Prescott, and then tell me what for?"

There was such a funny twinkle in his eyes that Pauline answered forthwith,—

"Yes, I forgive you, provided Miss O'Neil thinks I ought. But will you promise not to do so again?" Adding, with one of her lovely blushes, "Let us see, sir—what is it you are never to do again?"

"I am to give your sister no more roses," replied Mr. Loring.

And then they both smiled in a very friendly way, and not like a couple of Alpine peaks, as they've done lately. "The frost is coming out of the ground," thought I. It was just what I had been longing for, but hadn't expected, and now a good laugh had thawed it through and through. The first time Miss O'Neil ever played the part of a sunbeam, I'll warrant.

"Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well," said Robert aside to me. I knew that was Shakespeare, but didn't know whether it referred to Miss O'Neil

or me. Both of us are indiscreet enough, I should hope!

But somehow the sight of Pauline and Mr. Loring shaking hands like old times touched my heart; and that Soapsuds bubbling with satisfaction because I was to have no more roses, touched my risibility. I laughed, without the remotest idea I was crying, too, till I heard myself sobbing out, "O, dear me! I believe I do more harm asleep than other people do awake," meaning the Dream.

It was not at all the thing to say; and for fear I might put on an appendix that would be still worse, I flew out of the room in a sort of gale. Disagreeable age, Miss Tottenham!

And that was the time I saw the ghost. He stood leaning against the kitchen sink, with his hands in his pockets, just like real live laziness; and Thankful sat near by, chopping a vegetable hash, and smiling at him through her green spectacles—actually smiling. He had such a roly-poly figure, and twitched his front hair so respectfully when he saw me coming, that I never should have mistrusted he was a ghost, if Thankful hadn't introduced him.

"James Works," said she; "Josiah's brother, that lives at Poonoosac."

I started back. The man died last March. I remembered all the circumstances; how my father went in a driving storm, and found him battered to pieces, frightened and penitent; how he had been persuaded to make a will, restoring Thankful's thirds, and then had died in peace, leaving her with "something to lay her hands to." And now he had come to take it away

again. Why couldn't he stay dead? I went into mother's room, laughing.

"Mamma," said I, "if a man wills away his property, isn't he obliged to die before anybody can get at it?"

Mother looked at me as if she thought me insane.

"Marian, did you leave your guests in the parlor, and come here to ask me such a question as that? What have you been doing that makes you look so wild?"

"Nothing; only Robert spilled a little water over me, mamma. And the jelly — O, I dropped that on in the kitchen. What I want to know is, didn't James Works will Thankful his thirds?"

"*Her* thirds? Yes."

"Well, then, he ought to have died; and I am sure I thought he did."

"No, Marian; that is one of your mistakes. He is alive and well."

"Yes, mamma, and leaning against our sink."

"But he had been brought to see he was using ill-gotten wealth, Marian, and he would not let poor Thankful wait for his death before she had what really belonged to her."

"How sensible of him, mamma! Now that accounts for Thankful's green-glass smiles. I didn't see how she could be so good-natured to him, when she hates the whole race of mankind. But just think, it must have cost James something to live, if he had to take the money out of his own pocket."

Mother laughed a little; and then the amused look

changed into an angelic expression, which I couldn't bear to see.

"He has had such a glimpse of the great realities of life, Marian, that I suppose those few thousands seem no more to him now than motes floating in the sunshine. When we are brought so near the gates of heaven that we can look in—"

"Mother, mother, mother!" cried I, throwing my arms around her. "Don't say a word about heaven, unless you want to kill me."

I suppose she saw I was very much excited, for she stopped talking, and began to brush my hair, and wash out the jelly-stain in the waist of my dress, and soothe me with soft mother-touches, till I grew reasonable enough to be trusted in the parlor once more. When I got there, I was in such a daze that I forgot my manners worse than ever, as Pauline must have seen. But she didn't give me the curtain-lecture afterwards that I had expected. On the contrary, she kissed me very tenderly, and then held me out at arm's length, saying,—

"I must confess you are a graceful creature, Marian. Yes, that is true. I wish you would be a *little* more circumspect and composed. But, after all, dear, I don't know but it is just as well to let you alone. You will see for yourself, one of these days, how queer you are sometimes. And really you do behave better than Oscaforia Jones."

I could hardly believe my ears, for Oscaforia's manners are considered very remarkable. There was a straunger here last summer who said he had never seen

such high-bred composure in a girl of sixteen; he should think she had made the grand tour.

"Why, child, of course you can't be compared with her for studied elegance; that's not what I mean," said Pauline. "But I suppose the very fact that Oscaforia's elegance *is* studied makes it rather tiresome occasionally. I said to myself, this evening, Give me my dear little sister, with her perfect unconsciousness! I begin to think a certain friend of ours is right, who says it is Miss Marian's greatest charm."

I wanted to ask what friend of ours she meant; but, just as I looked up, and was going to speak, she blushed, and then I knew. O, yes! If Mr. Loring approves of me, I can wear a foolscap and bells, and no questions asked!

For, you see, I blundered into the front entry while he and Pauline were standing in the doorway, looking at the firmament on high, and heard him say to her, "Pauline, may I give you that polar star?" "May I?" As if he were so well acquainted up there that he thought of coaxing the Little Bear to shake it down, only he had his doubts about its being good enough for her! "Well, there," thought I, "Mr. Loring's generosity is growing upon him fast!" He gave me one of the "stars of earth,"—that's a flower,—but nothing short of the stars of heaven will do for Pauline; and perhaps they won't, either. "Stars, you'd better hide your diminished heads!"

Of course I knew what he meant. Something about constancy, and looking at the Little Bear up there at the same time he did, and "remembering me when this you see," and all that sort of foolishness.

I stole off as soon as possible; but that star has thrown a flood of light into my mind. I see the points of it! I shouldn't be surprised, any time, to hear of his writing letters to her, and her answering them too.

This is "surmising," though, and never will go any farther; for you may be pretty sure I shan't think aloud, or dream aloud, again, after all that has happened.

But one question comes to me very forcibly: Why is it that people grow sillier as they grow older? Intelligent people, I mean. For I certainly don't believe a girl of my age could stand and take the gift of a star without laughing. But Pauline did. She looked up at the sky, and never so much as smiled.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOTHER-WANT.

Miss Tottenham.

OCTOBER 1.



NLY a few days more, and they are to start. Do you hear that, Miss Tottenham? I tell my father that every time I look at mother I am cut to the heart. Yet I can't keep away from her; I feel better close to her. My father laughs, and says "it is on the principle of clasping a thorn close, and it won't prick."

My dear mother comes up stairs every night, and talks to me so beautifully that it seems as if I never could have a wrong thought again as long as I live. She makes God seem as close to me as the beatings of my own heart. And when she goes away, I have a feeling somehow as if she had left flowers in the room, and the softest moonlight, and such an air of peace! Now, I can't make you understand what I mean, and I don't think I really know myself!

Pauline has a great deal more to do yet before she is ready for Cuba. Sewing can't progress much when you are dancing off every other minute, taking walks and rides. Her going sailing last evening was a great piece of foolishness, for she was making a cambric

wrapper for mother, and I had to finish it myself. Just as I began on the button-holes, my father came in.

“Where is Pauline?” said he.

“Taking a boat-ride with Mr. Loring. The air will do her good,” replied mother, always ready to justify our eldest.

“Ah? Sits the wind in that corner?” said my father, as if it were news.

“Yes, sir,” spoke up Benjie, who was watching the river from the window; “the wind blows down stream; ‘twill blow ‘em home, and not half try.”

“Pauline has such quantities to do that I think her conduct is rather inconsistent,” said I, with some dignity, for I had just spoiled a button-hole.

My father looked at mother and smiled. Perhaps he thinks Pauline has been too hard upon Mr. Loring, and ought to make up for it now, even if she goes to Cuba with her clothes half made.

“Marian,” said he, “I intended to make you a birthday present, but was disappointed, and had to wait a month. Will it do just as well now?”

“O, papa, what a question!”

“Well, come out to the stable with me, then. Helen, my child, will you dare to come too?” “Helen, my child,” is mother’s name when she is unusually feeble. “Well, Marian,” said my father, “look there, and tell me what you think. Will that console you for Pauline’s inconsistent conduct?”

It was a little horse, a whitish-bay nag. I never was so delighted with anything in my life. I suppose I went a little wild, for such a present was quite beyond the limit of my expectations. My father never could

have afforded it if it had not come in payment of a debt he had given up for lost. He said he was satisfied, from the experiments I had made, that I could become a good rider—for all Keller laughed at me so much last summer, because I could not leap a Virginia fence at one bound. I never had half a chance to learn, for I could only ride Don Pedro a few minutes in the afternoon, and not then unless it was “a general time of health.” A *medical* horse cannot be depended upon.

But when I saw this nag, didn’t I give my father a good hugging? And didn’t I take the beautiful beast right into my heart, into the south-west corner of it, near the fireplace? You are aware, Miss Tottenham, it is having things for your very own that brings the love. When she rolled her eyes at me, and I knew they were *my* eyes, I loved every winker of them. “Fantine,” said I, “come to my arms!” Fantine was my first thought, but it has too many sad associations connected with “*Les Misérables*.” There is a certain airy, sprightly grace about my little horse, which suggests the name of Zephyr, and Zephyr it shall be. Her color is generally considered a reddish-gray; but it isn’t; it is roan. I call her “the red-roan steed,” and the dictionary is on my side. Ah, if I had only had her a month ago, before this heartache came to be chronic! Her dear little hoofs can’t trample down Cuba; and I can never be happy as long as Cuba’s head is above water.

October 9. I can’t stop looking out of the window at those golden-violet mountains. I’ve just had a horseback ride through Paradise Lane, and almost

know how Mr. Tennant felt when he came out of that trance, and didn't want to speak to anybody, lest he should lose sight of the wonderful vision. Why, Miss Tottenham,

“The world grows sweeter than a heart can bear.”

If I hadn't laughed so much at Judith all the way, it seems as if I should just have exhaled with ecstasy over those glorious old trees; for “Autumn has lighted his fire in the wood,” and every tree is a torch of a different color. But Judith does sit a horse like a bouncing rubber ball. I could think of nothing but Naomi Giddings and the calf. Robert kept saying, “Old woman, old woman, O, whither so high?” Her horse was that dead-and-alive thing of Mr. Liscom's, that couldn't be coaxed out of a creep if you fired a gun at his heels; but Judith was so afraid of being thrown, that when we were going single file through Paradise Lane, she made Robert ride backward, so he could watch the creature's head, while I kept an eye on his tail. My father prescribes horseback riding for Judith; but I should think it would give her an ague-cake like Mrs. Page's, she doubles herself up in such a heap. Robert is as tender of her as if she were his own grandmother. I wonder how much patience Keller would have with me, rocking round at such a rate.

Robert laughs at the name Zephyr. “If you refer to her breathing,” said he, “you'd better call her North-easter, and not mince the matter.”

Now that's too bad, for he means “heaves,” a kind of horse's asthma. But it is a mistake; my father has never observed it. It's only when she runs. But if

Robert once gets an idea fixed in his mind, you needn't try to argue with him.

There is something I've seen for myself, but I am careful not to mention it. She has a sore foot, and tries to favor it. I can't tell which one it is, though, for they all seem to be tender. When I saw her begin to limp, to-day, I talked as fast as I could, to take up Robert's attention.

"Let's stop and collect some specimens," said I, for he is crazy about bugs.

So we alighted in the loveliest spot, beside an unusually sprightly waterfall, that always reminds you of Undine, and Robert watered Zephyr as carefully as a tender flower. But, though I hurried with all my might, and brought him the horridest kind of a bug, I wasn't quite quick enough; he was taking up my dear Zephyr's feet, and examining them one by one. Then he shook his head over them, and smiled knowingly.

"Her shoes don't fit," said I.

"Ahem!" said he.

"Robert Willard, you have a spite against my horse, and have had from the beginning. How do you suppose the dear little animal enjoys having you criticise her feet, and feel her pulse, and examine her tongue? How would you like it yourself?"

"O, stop quarrelling!" said Judith. "I'm so tired!"

And Robert had to sit down and let her lean against him, while the most charming bug specimens went crawling by, and he couldn't get at them. That's the way she does. Think of my making a pillar, or pillow, of Keller, and his sitting still and allowing it!

Judith isn't strong, but it seems to me she might brace herself up a little.

Well, I mustn't stay here writing another minute. Only think how much I am losing! I might have been with mother for the last half hour!

October 13. Well, it is all over. Mother looked so beautiful in her travelling dress, and so full of animation, that it seemed like a farce her going away for her health. You would have taken Pauline for the invalid, she was so strongly scented with lavender on account of breaking the bottle in her pocket, instead of putting it in her satchel. If she continues so absent-minded, I am afraid mother will wish I had gone in her place.

My father meant to accompany them as far as Boston; but he couldn't possibly leave; he could only drive them to Poonoosac to take the cars. But Mr. Loring hadn't anything under the sun to do just at this time, and could go to Boston as well as not; and did. I never so much as made a single remark about it. Give me credit for that, Miss Tottenham. Indeed, I had all I could do to "control myself, and behave like a woman." I am afraid I should have broken down at the last, if mamma hadn't said, playfully,—

"Marian, I have made a will, whereby I bequeath to you your father and Benjie. Take care of your property, remember."

"I don't like a will," said I, "unless it is like James Works's, where the one that makes it stays round and sees to it."

Thankful was there, blowing up the air-cushion, and I fancied didn't like what I said; but I never can really

tell how she takes anything, for she hides behind those green glasses like a cat under the table.

I had to take my two hands off mother at last; and Thankful pulled Benjie away, just after he had kissed her all out of breath.

"Thankful," said dear mamma,—and she tried to smile,—“I could not feel as easy as I do about leaving home, if it were not for you. It isn't everybody I could trust not to desert my little family.”

Thankful “turned on her tears,” and said she “hoped mother hadn't known her all this time, to doubt her now. A woman that had been through as much as she had with Josiah was glad enough of a good steady home, and wasn't likely to change her situation.”

It was a singular time for the memoir; but Tom handed the reins to my father, and that cut it short. Mother leaned back against the cushion, never taking her eyes off Benjie and me. Pauline said, “Marian, remember to write;” and then Don Pedro started off, pulling at the reins, and at the cords of my heart too. I watched the carryall as long as I could see the little window behind, for it seemed like an eye looking back at us lovingly.

I just dreaded to go into the house, there was such a “mother-want” all over it from chamber to cellar. I went up to the attic, but actually it seemed just as bereaved as the bed-room, though I don't know that mother has set her foot in it for a year. I wandered out to the barn; but I missed her there just as much as if she were in the habit of hunting hens' eggs with me every day of her life.

I was going to have a look at my “red-roan steed,”

but overheard Robert, in the stable, telling Tom something about her feet needing a wash of castile soap and some kind of bark. As if my Zephyr had dirtier feet than other horses! Doesn't she walk on the same kind of a road?

What we shall do at our house I don't know. Thankful looks like a tombstone, and talks like an epitaph. I feel as if I were chief mourner at somebody's funeral. That solemn motto over my looking-glass is really consoling,—

“Think that To-day shall never dawn again.”

I should go distracted if it should!

Judith came over with some novels. She says they will soothe me like chloroform. Judith forgets that I never read a book without my father's approval,—a book of that sort, I mean.

“When you are out of your teens, daughter Marian, you may choose for yourself; but until then I really think you are safer to be guided by your mother and me.”

Is he too notional? Sometimes I think so. One thing is sure; I get precious few novels to read. He intends to bring me up on history and the natural sciences, with a sprinkling of poetry, and now and then a romance thrown in. Well, I am determined to honor my parents; and I wish Keller would. “By the way,” as he says, what has that boy been writing to Thankful about? I brought her the letter myself, and she coolly put it in her pocket.

It was so lonesome all day that I let Benjie whittle a steamboat, and paint it, right in the sitting-room.

"You couldn't have done that if Pauline had been at home," said I.

"No, you bet! Pauline knows better'n to let me!" said the ungrateful child. Benjie must stop talking slang, or I shall have to shut him up in the closet.

October 14. My father didn't get home till night, so many typhoid cases all along the road. The sitting-room looked as if it were going to ride out. His eyes roved all around, and a gloomy look came into them. I sprang up, and swept the shavings into the fire.

"How did mother seem when you left her? Did she send any message to me?"

"She bore up very cheerfully, and her message was, 'Tell Marian not to forget my legacy.' You see, daughter," said my father, drawing me down to his knee, "this will try us, and show what stuff we're made of."

"Yes, father, I've been in a furnace all day."

And so I had been, Miss Tottenham. And there I have staid ever since.

CHAPTER XV.

DULL DAYS.

Miss Tottenham.

OCTOBER 15.

 SHOULD think Pauline had eaten a lotus-berry, and forgotten all about home. Why doesn't she write? Mr. Loring did more than his duty, for he went as far as New York, and saw the travellers safely on board the mail steamer Cahawba. There they met Mr. and Mrs. Prince, according to agreement. Mamma was as bright and brave as when she left our door, and said the sea air was giving her new life. The state-room windows are very high, and she can have a breeze all night, if she likes. They started on the 12th, and would reach Havana in six days.

Of course there has not been time for a letter. I see it now that I have put down the dates in black and white. I am like Keller; he says he "gets considerable information from hearing himself talk."

The dull days drizzle along. It is pleasant at school; but I don't like to come home, unless I bring some of the girls. My father talks heroically about "rising superior to circumstances;" but I haven't observed that he is particularly jolly. Why is it that women are always missed so much more than men?

When my father is gone, mother keeps on regularly with whatever she is doing, and is as tranquil as ever; whereas if she herself is gone for only a day, my father seems to be thrown off his balance. He was in the habit of reading aloud to her in the evening; but it is not worth while to read to me. I cannot understand Carlyle, or Emerson, or Browning, or any of those men that talk with their mouths full. Moreover I am always gone. I wish I had kept an account of the number of times my father has said,—

“It seems strange here without your mother—doesn’t it?”

Or, “We see now who it was that made our home so pleasant.”

And then he gets his dressing-gown and goes off to his study, for we have fallen in the way of not having a fire in the sitting-room evenings. That was Pauline’s business. She always attended to the front part of the house; and perhaps Thankful thinks I might do it now; but the mornings are very short, and I don’t like to lose my horseback ride. Thankful digs into the carpet at if she were sub-soiling it; but she makes the chairs and tête-à-têtes stand up against the wall like total strangers come visiting. The sitting-room does not look natural. I wish Thankful showed more grace in arrangement. Now, Pauline and mother are always moving the furniture about, and giving a touch here and a touch there, like an artist painting a picture. But poor Thankful means well. I am not blaming her.

I am sorry to see that my father has less and less patience with her pocket-handkerchief. It come out regularly now, just after breakfast. Strange she hasn’t



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learned by this time that my father despises the sight of tears. She told me the other day she had "something on her mind;" but so she has had ever since I knew her. She grows neater than ever, and has positively taken to mopping the barn floor! I wonder what the horses think! Perhaps they are as homesick out there as we are in the house. My father hopes she won't scour the bark off the trees in the yard, like the Dutch wives of Broeck.

Benjie behaves awfully, always teasing and hanging on to my skirts. Marie Smith teaches a private school in the Probate Office; but he doesn't go half the time, on account of stiff necks, sore thumbs, toothaches, ear-aches, lame ankles, and frogs in the throat. There isn't an inch in his body that hasn't ached more or less since Marie began that school. Mother wouldn't mind his little whimseys; but my father laughs, and allows him to stay at home. The rest of us were ruled with a rod of iron. Why, at Benjie's age I didn't dare wink. I used to think children were as easily trained as pea-vines; but I don't think so now; I have to coax or drive that boy to bed every night, so I can go and spend the evening with Judith. If I left him up, he would be up when I came back; for Thankful is very weak about Benjie, and has no more authority than a fly.

October 25. A letter from Pauline. My father tried to appear stoical; but I could see he was as eager as I was, though he did not dance! "Mamma is quite comfortable;" that was the very first line. The journey scarcely fatigued her. She was interested in sea, and sky, and people; but poor Pauline felt very

sick, especially while crossing the Gulf Stream. There it grew suddenly rough, and the ocean much warmer, as if hot water were being poured in. Strange that the Gulf Stream never will unite with the Atlantic Ocean, but holds itself aloof, as if it belonged to another family. I should just enjoy cantering on its back. It must seem like a wild animal no man can tame. And those serene moonlight nights at sea, with the soft trade-wind clouds sailing across the sky; how mamma must have revelled in them! for she feels the beautiful, just as if it were God himself speaking to her.

Pauline remarked that the Southern Cross was to be seen just above the horizon; so it seems she still remembers to look at the stars. Havana is built close to the sea; and when they came in sight of it, she grew dreadfully homesick. The idea of being homesick where mother is! I ought to have been the one to go. The flag of Spain was a distressing sight to her eyes. It is very gaudy, with red and yellow stripes, and glares over the Moro Lighthouse like a torch. Well, what if it does? She says the blue, and white, and yellow houses, with red roofs, are not like New England. I should think she would be glad of it. What is the use to go so far from home, if you can't see something new?

At Havana they parted with Mr. and Mrs. Prince, who went on to New Orleans, as they had intended; but Dr. Ware was at Havana, on the lookout for the Cahawba; and he came from the wharf in a boat to meet mother and Pauline. Very kind of him; but I cannot forget that he has no hope of mother, and the very sound of his name is disagreeable to me.

He took them to a fine hotel, where the walls are so high that you need a spy-glass to see a fly on the ceiling. They rode in a volante, and the black driver rode too, on the horse's back. There's laziness! Pauline says the streets are so narrow that you go very close to the houses, and can look in through the glassless windows and see what the people are doing.

Mamma was sadly disappointed because Madame Almy could not receive them at once; but as I said before, Dr. Ware took them to an elegant hotel, the Le Grand, where they will remain a few days. Pauline likes the breakfasts — delicious fruits; fish with all the colors of the rainbow; various other dainties, and — fried plantains. (She didn't say whether they had any fried smart-weed !)

How I wish I were in Cuba! It is so commonplace at home! Ladies there do not walk in the streets; and when they go riding, it is in full dress, with flowers, jewels, fans, &c., but no bonnets. They never pretend to go shopping; the shops go to them; that is, the clerks carry out goods to the doors of the carriages, and the dainty ladies buy what pleases them.

I can imagine dear mother riding through those streets as pale as a northern snow-drop, and Dr. Ware smiling blandly, with hand on vest pocket, ready at a moment's notice to whip out a bottle of some sort of reviving drops. He went there for his health as much as she did, and, for all I can see, is just as likely to die. He has such a beam in his own eye, how can he see the mote in mother's?

And I can imagine Pauline sitting up in the volante with her high-bred air. The postilion would probably

take her for a Spanish lady, on account of her brown eyes and dark complexion, only she had no ball-dress and fan.

November 5. I have had six little tea-parties. Miss O'Neil came to three. Once the "verbal music" attracted her, and twice it didn't. I enjoy my "young mates" better when Pauline is not here to criticize.

November 6. It seems to take James Works a long time to execute that will. I seldom go into the kitchen of an evening but I see him leaning against the sink. His conversation must be very edifying. I heard him tell Thankful about a red cow of his that was "breachy." "I mean to turn her into another cow," said he, "and then beef her." That may be the English language, Miss Tottenham, but it does not sound like it. Last night, when Thankful was taking the apple-butter off the stove, he said, in pompous tones, "Shall I render you some assistance?" But she had the kettle off and the stove-cover on before he took his hands out of his pockets.

I wish Thankful would not talk so much about our family affairs. She asked me the other day if it was not very expensive having mother and Pauline in Cuba, and Keller at boarding-school. I told her it probably was; but I hoped she wouldn't take it to heart, as she had just as many troubles of her own as she could possibly bear.

"So I have," sighed she; "I have been singled out for affliction from my youth up. But perhaps your father's business affairs concern me more than you think. Being a widow so, I have to look out for myself."

I cannot imagine what she means. If her wages are

paid regularly, isn't she "looked out for" enough? Perhaps she might feel easier if she knew of the five hundred dollars, in government bonds, which aunt Hinsdale gave me for my name. Thankful is naturally low-spirited, but I never knew her so low as this. My father says her eyes are a couple of water-sluiices in excellent repair. What can be the matter? I wonder if she feels grieved by my thoughtlessness? Mother never asked her to mend the clothes from the wash, not even Benjie's, for her eyes are weak (as might be expected)! But I can't remember to take a needle in hand till Saturday night about bed-time, when of course the mending is all done. She loves me dearly, and thinks all my faults are very excusable; but perhaps she is overwhelmed by my giving so many tea and dinner-parties—more than a dozen, I declare. She is considered the best cook in Quinnebasset; and it taxes her ingenuity to get up new dishes, I suppose. I have had Judith and Marie every noon regularly, and yesterday asked Oscaforia and Sarah Hinsdale, because I happened to meet them on the street, and forgot entirely that Thankful was down with sick-headache. It did seem rather cruel, and the dear soul felt so mortified about the burnt pudding-sauce, that I asked her forgiveness, and gave her mother's purple breakfast shawl. My father said I might; he dislikes purple. He asked me yesterday if I wasn't afraid Thankful worked too hard. I have decided to invite no more company for the present; but really it is Thankful's own fault that I pine for society. If she were not here, I verily believe I should not be so lonesome.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW RESOLVE.

Miss Tottenham.

NOVEMBER 15.



AULINE writes that they are comfortably established at Madame Almy's, and like very much. Mother was annoyed at the Le Grand by not having a bed to sleep on; nothing but sacking, without a mattress. She heard clocks striking the quarter hours all night, and watchmen blowing whistles, and crying "serenos" at every stroke, all of which disturbed her rest. Pauline says she is really gaining now. Isn't it glorious? Dr. Ware does not improve, and has gone to Matanzas. Just as I expected!

Last night I went to the sink to get some water for my plants, having forgotten them in the morning, and Thankful began about my father's heavy expenses again, and asked me if I had never been afraid Keller might run in debt. Boys often do at school, she says. "But there is this about it," she added, as if to comfort me; "if he should run in debt, your father is an honorable man, and would feel responsible, you may be sure of that."

I could not see what interest she should have in the

question, or what satisfaction she could take in conjuring up such absurd notions ; but I merely said,—

“ O, yes ; my father is sure to do the right thing, whatever it is.”

“ That is what I always tell folks,” cried she ; “ he’s a good, pious man, if he does speculate so much in real estate ; and when your sister is married, there’ll be one less to provide for.”

I didn’t say a word ; it was such a shock to hear her speak of Pauline’s being married. I had never thought of it before, not definitely—still, I suppose it *will* come to that in time — one of these years. Well, Pauline is very much mistaken if she thinks she can ever be as happy anywhere else as she is at home. How can she bear the thought of leaving her father and mother ?

“ Yes ; you see there’ll be one less to provide for,” said Thankful ; “ and your father’s expenses won’t be so heavy ; so I tell folks it’s no use to borrow trouble. Do you suppose your sister’ll marry, come another spring ? ”

“ My sister has never spoken of being married at all, and it is a subject I do not think proper to discuss,” said I, with some dignity.

But Thankful only sniffed, and said,—

“ Haven’t I got a pair of eyes in my head ? Can’t I see who comes to this house ? ”

“ Perhaps you mean Mr. Works, of Poonoosac,” said I ; “ he is here oftener than any one else.”

Thankful sighed heavily at that.

“ James Works was my husband’s own brother,” said she. “ It is a pity if he can’t come here to see me

on business, without people in the village making remarks."

"I never heard it mentioned," said I.

"O, but it is in everybody's mouth, child. His being a widower so, makes it very unpleasant for me," said she, going into her pocket handkerchief. "He has been here on very solemn business lately, I can assure you. I have been having Josiah taken up and put in the new graveyard at Poonoosac."

Then she fell to crying so hard that I could not imagine what it was for, knowing it certainly wasn't for grief, till she broke forth very spitefully, —

"I declare for it, there isn't the least honor among sextons. I paid Mr. Black handsomely for taking up Josiah; but I've no idea I got more than half of him!"

"Why, Thankful Works!" said I, trying my best not to smile.

"No, I really don't think I got more than half. I'd be willing to leave it out to anybody if it wasn't a very small mess of bones for a man of his size."

It was such a singular thing to show temper about! and she looked so dreadfully indignant that I hurried off as fast as possible, shaking so that half the water from the sprinkler ran into my slipper. When I reached the sitting-room, I told my father how Thankful had been imposed upon in the matter of bones, and he laughed heartily, for the first time, I believe, since mother went away.

"Thankful's strong point is her indignation," said he. Then he repeated a letter, word for word, which she

once wrote her brother-in-law, beginning, "Indignation still burns in the bosom of myself;" &c.

"But she has forgiven James Works since he gave back the thirds," said I; "and they are the best of friends. He is as interested in her as an own brother."

November 18. My work-box happened to be sitting on the stairs yesterday, and Benjie fell over it headlong. Thankful decided that his knee was broken, and we laid him screaming on the sofa to await my father's return. How I longed for mother! It was a season of great remorse and anxiety for me, till Jowler happened to come into the room with a stick in his mouth when Benjie jumped up and ran after him. My fears subsided then. All the little boys in town heard of the fearful accident, and came with their dogs to make visits of condolence—very good for lameness. The more boys, the less limping. Benjie is trying hard this evening to save up a little stiffness against to-morrow, just enough to keep him out of school. No doubt he'll succeed. I'll put him to bed now, and go to Judith's.

November 19. Robert came in this morning with a beaming face.

"Where is your father?" cried he; "I've found a live—"

There, I forget the name; but it's something that crawls.

Thankful says, "It does beat all how folks can have their minds taken up with such small concerns." I thought of that very thing myself when I saw her cry about the pudding sauce.

November 20. Mother has written two precious

letters to my father. She still improves, and would be very happy if she had us all with her. She says, —

“Tell dear little Marian to take good care of my legacy. Her task is no light one; but we do not expect or ask for our child an easy time in the world, and it may be as well for her to learn young the lesson that ‘with self-renunciation begins life.’ I hope she remembers that even Christ pleased not himself.”

No, dear mamma, I had not remembered it! I, who once thought I was trying to be like him! I want to hide my face for shame.

“With self-renunciation begins life.” I am sure Carlyle said that, for the words are put together in the hardest way. But what does it mean? Why, that we must put self one side before we can really *live*. Self, self, get thee behind me!

Dear mamma pities me, and thinks I am wearing myself out for the family; and here I am, floating about like a great lazy butterfly.

My father said in his prayer this morning, “Teach us how sublime a thing it is to live.”

Yes, there is such a thing as making one’s life sublime,—for instance, mother; and there is such a thing as making it ridiculous,—for instance, Marian.

Papa, you shall not spend all your evenings alone. Thankful, you’ll do no more mending. Benjie, you needn’t go to bed with the chickens. Poor little fellow, is it your own sister Mamie that has abused you so?

Into the writing-desk, Miss Tottenham. I wish to have a little private conversation with myself.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRIGHTENING THE HOUSE.

Miss Tottenham.

NOVEMBER 25.

 DO believe there is no satisfaction equal to that of acting from high motives. After mother's letter came, I aroused myself, and determined to take my true place as the daughter of the house. Not that I expected anything particular would come of it, or that anybody would observe it; I hope I am more genuine than that! I merely meant, as Thankful says in prayer-meeting, to "do my duty as far forth as I know how."

Firstly, I announced to Mrs. Works that I intended to take care of the front part of the house.

"Well," said she, coolly, "you'll find the broom in the cellar-way."

I labored over the sitting-room till it seemed like itself, and the pieces of furniture looked as if they were acquainted with one another once more. Then Zephyr and I galloped through Paradise Lane, and gathered boughs of late autumn leaves to light up the walls of the room, and give a warm tone to the pictures and statues. But real heat we must have too; for I was

determined to lure papa away from that old office. I was just lighting the fire when Judith walked in.

"O, dear!" said she; "why haven't you been over? I didn't feel able to come, and it has put me all out of breath."

"My father says the women of this age are 'born fatigued,'" said I; "and of all the tired specimens, you are the tiredest, Miss Judith. I didn't go to your house, because I had work to do. Benjie's all out at elbows, and I found a hole in the hall carpet, and—"

"Why, Marian, it would kill me to work at such a rate. Your face is the color of that blush rose. Just look in the glass, and see if it isn't. What possesses you, all of a sudden?"

"O, I'm trying to make it look natural and pleasant for Keller when he comes home to Thanksgiving."

That really was one little reason floating on top; but the solid reason underneath was, that I was trying to do right. You know our *deepest* motives are the very ones we can't tell.

"Do these andirons look bright enough, Jude?"

"Gay as gold," said she. "I like your brass-topped fender and your pictorial bellows beyond everything. This is just the cosiest house in town."

"Yes," said I; "only Thankful has cried so much that the walls feel damp, and we need a roaring fire."

"You wouldn't complain of Thankful, if you had to live with aunt Esther," said Judith. "She has turned our house into a regular rag-factory, and is making 'drawn-in' rugs out of our old clothes. I'm so glad Robert won't let me sew, or I should be kept at it all

day, like Tid and Mate. Just think how stupid it is for me, Marian! Tid and Mate pair off, you know, and I don't have much to do with them, and the little boys are only a trial, and father stays at the store most of the time. If it wasn't for Robert, I should just die. He is the only one in the house that tries to make things comfortable."

I wanted to say, "Why don't you try yourself?" But I won't preach, so there! Let me practise a while first. While I brushed the hearth, Judith lay back on the sofa with half-shut eyes, and I asked what she was dreaming about.

"O," said she, "if we could only make the world over again, how beautiful it might be! We would leave out all the disagreeables, such as east winds, and rain-storms, and 'equinomical' people; and we'd preserve the roses and zephyrs, and rainbows and good times. I'm going to live with my Reginald in a castle by the sea, with opal sunsets dipping into the blue waves; and there'll be none of the trials of life coming to beat against the walls. He will be a poet-laureate, with a wreath of amaranth round his brow."

"Brown paper and vinegar will be better, Jude, if he's troubled with headache."

"Hush, Marian! And he will adore me as your father does your mother."

"I can't see any earthly reason why he should," cried I. And then we fell into a fit of laughing; and in the midst of it, my father stalked through the room, which mortified Judith so much that she slipped out by the side door and went home. If we ever do get to laughing in that absurd way and can't stop, my

father is sure to appear, with a preternaturally solemn face, and say something sarcastic about the "giggling age."

This time he was so tired, after a hard ride, that he scarcely spoke till he had had a cup of tea. Then, after a remark to Benjie on the subject of jackknives, he went into the sitting-room again on his way to the office. Now, my father isn't a man that observes things in detail; he couldn't have told what I had been doing to the room; but he saw that the general effect was different, and his face lighted up wonderfully.

"So you've been cleaning house, daughter. And you've set the fire to blazing again. Well, that's pleasant. O, you're expecting company — are you?"

"No, papa; don't be frightened; nobody but yon. I built the fire for the rheumatic oid flies. I see they wake up stiff in the morning when they go to bed cold."

"Well, well," said he, laughing, "I suppose if I enjoy the fire too, it won't interfere with the flies. I'll bring my books in here, and we'll try to-be sociable."

Then Benjie shuffled in through the entry as if he were being dragged.

"I say, Mamie, I don't want to go to be-ed!"

But when he saw the fire dancing on the hearth, he sprang into my arms, crying,—

"Isn't it festive? Who's a-coming? Mayn't I sit up and see 'em?"

"There is no one coming, Benjie; and if you'll be a dear, quiet little boy, you may sit up till you are sleepy."

"Hooray! Hoora-ay! Hooray for evermore!" shouted he, swinging his arms in ecstasy.

Dear little fellow! There is such a thing as children's rights, and I don't mean to interfere with yours any more.

"Well, this is cheerful," said my father, wheeling in his big chair, and putting on the dressing-gown I had ready for him.

The fire brightened his whole face, and warmed his imagination, so that he began to make up the most entertaining stories; and Benjie sat on his knee, drawing in his little lips as if he were imbibing nectar.

After a while we fell to discussing all sorts of subjects; and I thought, as I've often thought before, that my father, in certain moods, is the most agreeable man I ever saw. I asked him if he could hear my lessons again next winter. He said, Certainly, if we would submit to a little irregularity.

"And, papa, are you willing Judith should recite with me in Latin?"

I dared not add geometry, for Judith is very much afraid of him, and would never like to have him know how dull she is in figures.

"O, yes; I shall be quite willing to hear her recitations when she is not up in the blue."

"O, papa, she is not half so absent-minded as you think. People don't understand Judith."

"Probably not. Sentimental young ladies are too deep to be understood."

When he called Judith "sentimental," with that quiet smile of his, there didn't seem to be anything left of her bigger than the head of a pin. I hastened to change the subject by showing him a fossil Robert had found in the woods. But that only reminded him to

say he wished Judith had an interest in the natural sciences; for then she might not sit curled up like a dormouse, but run about enough to get a little color, and correct the morbid tone of her mind. My father is very hard on Judith. I believe he thinks she is the sort of girl to elope with a dancing-master. Robert is after his own heart, because he is fond of poking in the dirt. He is the only person in town who has free access to my father's office, and library, and surgical instruments. He spends hours combining fluids of different colors in a retort, and weighing gases, which, I suppose, is a sign of a well-balanced mind. As if we were all expected to be just alike in this world! Judith may not love science, but she dotes on poetry; and let her faults be what they may, she is my best friend, and I won't have my own father ridicule her if I can help it.

December 4. Keller has come and gone. At first it seemed very odd to him without mother and Pauline; but I tried my very best to be agreeable, and never let the fire go low in the sitting-room, and he said it was jollier than he expected. Really he came very near being confidential with me. He was like himself, only he didn't whistle; and mother says, "I shall always feel safe about my two boys as long as I can hear them whistle." I hope there isn't any trouble on his mind that has stopped the music. I told him how tearful Mrs. Works had been this fall, and how she even cried at the bare idea of his running in debt; and he began to walk the floor, and look so confused, that it startled me, though I will not be mean enough to suspect that that boy has done anything



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wrong. Thankful was so overjoyed to see him, that she put on the purple shawl, and smiled all over her face.

"Why, Thankful," said he, "how handsome your shoulders are! What has been your object in hiding them under layers of capes, shortest ones uppermost, like shingles on the roof of a house?"

She laughed, for she lets Keller say what he pleases.

"You look like another woman," he said. "What has become of your owl-eyed glasses, and your outlandish cap? Somebody will be falling in love with you, next thing."

Thankful groaned.

I enjoyed Keller's visit hugely, only he made fun of Zephyr.

"She was taken for a bad debt," he said, "and ought to be a bad horse, which, if I am any judge, she certainly is."

He means nothing against her moral qualities, for a sweeter pony never breathed. Physically speaking, she may not be all I could wish; but how is she to blame for that? In addition to the tenderness of her feet, I am afraid she is having trouble with one of her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MYSTERY IN THE ATTIC.

Miss Tottenham.

JANUARY 1.



EPHYR began the year by a fall. Tom was leading her into the barn, and she fell flat on the ice. "What ice?" I hear you ask, Miss Tottenham. Well, I should call it the glaciers of neatness. Thankful had just been washing the barn again, and, as the thermometer is two degrees below zero, the floor froze as smooth as glass. The dear beast was dreadfully shaken. Tom rubbed her faithfully, and I went out and fed her with cake. If Thankful's extraordinary neatness continues, Zephyr must wear skates.

I went into the kitchen, which was fragrant with boiling suds, and said I, "Thankful, do please tell me what ails you. You never were in the habit of washing the barn floor; you know you never were."

She only answered by a burst of tears. I looked at her critically, and was struck with the yellow tinge of her face. Instead of "strawberries smothered in cream," it is more like orange-peel smothered in lemonade.

"Thankful," said I, "perhaps it is your liver. My

father will give you some pills, if you will only describe the case."

"Pills?" echoed Thankful with a grim smile. "If he'll mix me something that'll settle my mind, I'll thank him."

"O, is that it?"

"Yes; that's just it. I don't suppose you'd take me for a shifty-minded woman; now would you?"

"No, indeed, Thankful; I thought your mind was always made up tight, and fastened with an iron bolt."

"You dear little soul," said she, offering me a chair, "I wish you'd sit down here, and tell me your candid opinion of James Works."

"Why, Thankful, I am not in the least acquainted with Mr. Works. I've only seen him in passing through the room."

"Very true; but I'm kind of curious to know how he strikes you. There isn't another girl of your age in Quinnebasset so sharp-witted as you are, and that's what I've always maintained."

"Why, Thankful!" said I, very much flattered; "I'm sure I ought to answer your question after such a compliment as that! You would like to know what sort of impression I have received of Mr. Works, just from seeing him a few times?"

"Yes, dear, I want your honest mind," said Thankful, smoothing down her outside cape.

"Well, if you really wish to know, he is dreadfully disagreeable to me. I'm tired to death of seeing him tilted back against the kitchen wall like a great bag of meal. And that everlasting smile! It doesn't mean a thing; it's only a pucker of the lips, like getting

ready to whistle. And then his hands always in his pockets! How *do* you stand it, Thankful, to have him round so much?"

Thankful drew herself up as straight as Bunker Hill Monument. I never *was* so surprised; after she had asked my opinion too!

"I should be pleased to know, Marian Prescott," said she, "what James Works has ever done to you or any of your folks that you should run on in that style! You don't know anything about him. And I think it would be quite as becoming in a girl of your age to talk more respectful!"

With that Thankful walked right out in the dark kitchen and shut herself up. The next moment she began to sing. She always sings when her feelings are hurt. And O, dear, such dismal hymns! I hate to wound her, on that account. I'm sure I hadn't the least idea she ever cared enough for her husband to resent what was said of his brother. But it seems she did.

January 3. Thankful has scarcely spoken for two days. She is perfectly pleasant and polite, but every word seems to come from the depths of a broken heart. If she expects me to take back what I said about James Works, she will be disappointed. She asked my opinion — didn't she? Well, I gave it; and if it was a wrong one, so much the better for James. He may be the salt of the earth, and I hope he is; but I don't believe it. He came again last night, and I went into the kitchen, not knowing he was there. He said it was a "trimmer of a cold night; and didn't I think a man that had come all the way from Poo-

noosac to see Mrs. Works ought to have a cup of her celestial ginger tea?"

He winked, and looked so silly, that I think it mortified Thankful, for she disappeared behind the pantry door.

January 5. Such strange things are happening at our house! I think, as Zephyr does, that the world has grown slippery. Thankful told my father last night she would like to consult him in his office. I supposed it must be in relation to some hidden disease, and pitied her very much. Her mother died of dropsy. I wondered if it was hereditary. I didn't believe Thankful could have it, though, because she shed so many tears!

"Papa," said I, when he came back to the sitting-room, "is it anything I may ask you about?"

He drew his chair before the fire, and broke out into little explosions of laughter.

"Yes, I'd as lief tell you as not. Thankful has been asking my candid opinion of James Works."

"Why, she asked mine too! Did you give yours, papa?"

"Yes, Marian, I was just such a fool. I was taken off my guard, in the first place, by her talking as if she did not intend to marry him."

"Marry him, papa! I should think not! Did he ever dare ask her?"

"It seems he has had the courage. But she says she told him one slice off a loaf was enough, and she didn't approve of marrying twice into the same family. I assured her she was quite right. 'James Works is a mercenary, good-for-nothing fellow, and is after your

money,' said I. 'If you accept him, you'll be doing a foolish thing.'

"I spoke my honest convictions, out of regard to the good soul, for I really respect her; but next minute I saw my mistake. I knew by the nipping of her lips that she had made up her mind to marry him."

"Why, father Prescott! After all she has said about 'never marrying again, no, never'?"

"Well, yes; after all that, my dear. 'Thank you, doctor,' said she. 'No doubt you've stated your candid opinion; but I see you've been misinformed. James Works is a very different man from what you take him to be. He's a better calculator than Josiah was; but as for being stren-oo-ous about a half cent, as some folks tell about, it's no such a thing."

"That told the whole story—that and the flash of her eye. Good enough for me! And, daughter Marian, if I ever give another candid opinion, may I be served in the same way again!"

Then my father rubbed his hands and laughed. Well, if he sees anything funny in it, it is more than I do. I always supposed Thankful a truthful woman, but now it seems to me she has perjured herself. Papa evidently excuses her, though, and thinks her mind is weak—weak as water! If *I* had said I should not marry, you might be sure my mind was made up, and couldn't be turned. Not that I ever did say such a thing. It is best to be careful of one's words.

January 7. What are we going to do without Thankful? Affairs are approaching a crisis. She told me to-day she "didn't care any great about James, but she should have to marry him to get rid of him."

Such an idea! But she may not mean it. I find she doesn't always mean what she says. But one thing is sure: she will leave us as soon as we can find another girl. How would poor mother feel? And she so easy about us, trusting in the widow Works, and believing she truly hates "the whole race of mankind." O, Thankful, Thankful! why don't you stick to your appendix?

January 15, and in the midst of it a great excitement. Night before last, just as I was going to sleep, I heard a sudden noise outside my window, which is over the dining-room. It was the crunching of snow under a man's boots. Who could be walking there at that time of night? It was ten o'clock, cloudy and starless, the snow falling fast. Why didn't he go along the path to the side door, instead of wading through the deep snow up to the window? He must be a thief, trying to get into the dining-room. Perhaps he did not know the house, and thought we kept silver. Or perhaps he did know the house, and was aware that my father and Tom were both gone, and nobody left but two helpless women and a little child. I heard him come nearer and nearer, and actually try, very gently, to open one of the dining-room windows.

I sprang out of bed, and crept into Thankful's room over the kitchen. It was dark there, but I could see a ray of light from Thankful's candle, as she was disappearing through the door that leads from the foot of the stairs into the kitchen.

Presently I heard a low scream, and after that the sound of whispering. I know I did. I hurried on my clothes, determined to find out what it meant. By

that time Thankful had stolen up stairs again. I rushed into her room in the greatest excitement; but there she sat on the bed, as calm as a clock, with her green wrapper on, and yawning, as if she had just waked up.

"What is it? Who is it?" I whispered.

"What's what?" said she, rubbing her eyes.

Such duplicity! I couldn't and wouldn't endure it. Did the woman think I was deaf, blind, and half witted?

"Thankful Works," said I, beside myself with rage, "you needn't try to cheat me! James Works was breaking into this house, and you went down and sent him away. I guess you'll think more of my 'candid opinion' next time about scamps! Don't talk! Don't say a word! I've heard, and I know! and my father shall be informed this very night!"

That finished the business. Thankful stared at me with strong displeasure, and said she,—

"I wish you better manners. I was revolving it round in my mind whether I'd better tell you what had happened; but now I *certain* shan't."

And that was all I could get out of her, except that it wasn't any of the Workses. Why did I speak so hastily? I told my father about it, but he said "Pooh, pooh! Only somebody come to return a borrowed coffee-pot or tea-spoon."

That's a likely story!

January 17. I had settled down quietly, and nearly forgotten my excitement, till to-night I happened to come upon Thankful, as she was stealing down the attic stairs with a plate and cup in her hand. She hid

them under her apron very suddenly, though she must have known I had seen them. I said not a word, but fixed my eyes steadily upon her.

There is some one concealed in this house; I feel it all over me. That accounts for the voices I thought I heard yesterday in the attic. There can be nothing wrong going on. Thankful is as true as steel,—about everything but marriage. I am not alarmed, but devoured with curiosity. The attic door is locked, for I tried it. I thought I heard the shuffling of feet.

Put your ear down close, Miss Tottenham. I suspect it's Keller up there! Can anything have happened that makes him want to hide? I remember he didn't whistle last November. If it is Keller, why didn't he confide in his own sister Marian? But though he didn't, I'll not betray him. I'll give no hint of this to my father.

It may not be Keller; but whoever it is that is hidden away among those old cobwebs, I'll soon find out. Mrs. Works needn't think anything clandestine can be carried on in this house without my sifting it to the bottom.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEARDING THE LION.



LL alone in the attic of his father's house, among lazy wasps and spinning spiders, sat Keller Prescott eating an apple. Not daring to walk about lest he should make too much noise, he sat so very still that an enterprising spider had begun to attach him to the rafter, by what she considered a rope.

It was a new thing for Keller to keep so quiet—a tedious thing. If he looked out of the dingy window, he saw only a white landscape; if he shut his eyes, his mind made pictures he did not care to see. Here is one picture which tired him strangely. It was drawn from memory.

Six youths, on a dark night, groping up hill, and into the barn of a venerable clergyman to steal his family carryall. What did they want of it? O, it would be fun to wheel it down hill, and hide it in the hearse-house. Can't live without fun, you know. Very dark night. No moon, no stars, and, luckily, no dog. Three of the youths go behind the carryall, and three take hold of the thills. "By the way, boys, guess the parson keeps his sermons in here! About heavy enough, hey?" Going down hill, it rolls faster. Boys begin to chuckle,

when suddenly a whip cracks, and a voice from the carryall calls out, "Thank you, young men. I'm having a very nice ride; but you may just turn around now, and haul me up hill!" Consternation dire! It is the voice of Professor H.! How and when he hid in the carryall nobody knows; but there he is, and the boys, outwitted, turn about and haul him up in silence. "Crack goes the whip, round go the wheels;" was ever load like this?

Other pictures come up. One of them is painted on a chapel window with lampblack and molasses, and over it the ominous words, "Suspension for this offence."

By the way, what an endless while from breakfast till dinner! Was Thankful ever coming with that fancy roast and mince pie? Keller heard a step on the stairs, and started up eagerly. It was not Thankful. She made the boards creak under her slipperey feet. This was Marian; he knew her light, quick tread, and the click of her little heels.

"What does she want here?" thought he, crouching involuntarily.

Marian tried the door; it was locked fast. She shook it, poked a shingle under it, muttered something, and clattered down again.

"She has gone to tell father the door is fastened," thought Keller. "They'll be up here with hammer and tongs! If Miriam is on my track, it is all day with me!"

For the next half hour the youth listened intently; but no sound was heard save the nibbling of rats in the walls. Then Thankful appeared with the dinner.

"What's up?" exclaimed Keller, plucking at her sleeve. "Marian's been here and tried the door. Did you hear? Did she tell?"

"No, not a word. You needn't be a grain concerned; her head is so full of everything she'll never think of it again."

And setting the waiter on the top of a chest, and heaving a sigh, which was either to the memory of Josiah, or to Dr. Prescott's "candid opinion" of James, Thankful stole gingerly down stairs.

Keller moved an old rocking-chair towards the chest, and proceeded to enjoy his dinner. There was nothing so good for his spirits as eating. He removed the cover from the fancy roast, and the savory odor caused him to rub his hands with satisfaction.

"Thankful's a brick."

He drew his napkin out of its ring, and spread it across his knees. In so doing a piece of paper flew out, and fluttered down to the floor. Keller took it up mechanically; it had been folded into the napkin by mistake, no doubt; but there was so little to amuse him just now, that he could not let even a slip of paper pass without looking at it. It proved to be a three-cornered note addressed to himself. "She's caught me; it's all over with me," groaned Keller.

"You dear old boy; now don't be frightened, and say, 'She's caught me; it's all over with me;' for I shan't tell my father, Keller, I give you my word. I know you think I'm sharp-cornered, and you don't love me as you do Pauline; but I've been rolling myself in sugar all winter, and you've no idea how sweet I have grown."

"I'm going up at two o'clock. Let me into the attic, Keller, there's a dear brother, and then you can tell me just what you've done that makes you want to hide your head. I'm sorry for you, and I love you, and I promise not to tell. Marian."

"Whew! This beats all!" said Keller, giving the rocking-chair a jerk which nearly upset the chest. "Bless her heart, she shall come in. Besides, I couldn't keep her out with a double-barrelled gun."

At two o'clock there was a second clattering of little boot-heels, and Keller opened the door before Marian had time to knock. A beam of sunshine seemed to dance into the dusty garret with her golden head and sparkling eyes.

"O, Keller, I don't know what you've done; but if you've committed murder I shall always love you just the same," cried she, throwing herself, laughing and crying, into his arms.

Keller returned the embrace with unusual fervor.

"How did you know I was up here, you little witch?"

"La, Keller, a body doesn't need to be a witch to hear people break into a house. I knew when Thankful let you in, but wasn't sure 'twas you till you crept down stairs last night to see Benjie."

"How did you know that, for gracious sake?"

"Why, you left this neck-tie, dear, the one I made last fall—dropped it on the bed. Haven't you missed it?"

"There, Marian, I might have known you'd ferret me out," said Keller, in a tone half admiring, half fretful. "I ought to have gone to you in the first place, only I

thought you wouldn't understand how a fellow got in in such a fix."

"Does Robert know you're here?"

"No; what business is it of his?"

"Keller, have you a pocket comb?" (The boy has no idea how wild he looks!) "Put your head in my lap. There, you like my scraping as well as ever—don't you?"

"Yes," said Keller, yielding to the soothing sensation gratefully. "It does seem good to see somebody besides spiders. Tell you what, Marian— By the way—"

A long pause.

"O, dear," thought Marian, "what is it? He looks so haggard and queer! I don't want to know one word! But here I am, the daughter of the house. I must! I must! Who is there but me to attend to him? He shan't go to destruction if I can pull him back."

"You see, the fact is—"

"That's right, Keller; tell me all about it, just as you would to mother or Pauline."

"Why, Marian, what's come over you? I believe you *have* been rolled in sugar! I was just going to remark that I'm two hundred—dollars—in debt! How does that sound for a young man of my age?"

Marian started, and unconsciously drove the comb deep into Keller's scalp.

"You needn't ask any questions. Goodness knows what's become of the money; I don't. That house-keeping with Brownie was plaguy expensive, and I lent several X's; and it's the fashion to treat; and I—well,

it got so steep I had to borrow of Thankful; and now here's James Works in my hair!"

"James Works?"

"Yes. Don't dig so! Easy! He threatens to tell father, and sue him, too, if I don't fork over."

"Tell him yourself, Keller; that's the best way. Indeed and indeed he ought to know."

"I didn't ask your advice — did I?" said the youth, sulkily. "See here; you promised, honor bright, you wouldn't expose me."

"Am I, or am I not, to be trusted, Keller Prescott?"

"Don't be touchy, sister. I'm a used-up man, and that's what's the matter. Father'd take my head off if he knew, and it's nothing out of the way either, if you look at it in the right light."

"Keller, dear, go on and tell the whole. I promise not to scold. Blush against my apron. I can't see your face, you know."

Whereupon, blushing to order against the dainty white apron, Keller took courage to reveal all his "scrapes," beginning with the carryall, and winding up with the lampblack and molasses.

"Now, Marian, I was no worse than the other fellows. We all got tired of having the old prof dilate on the beauty of stained glass, and quote Milton so big. We agreed we'd give him some 'dim religious light,' if he wanted it; but it didn't seem to suit; wasn't dim enough perhaps! And some of the sticky stuff got on my clothes, of course; I'm always the scapegoat of the crowd. That brought me out, you see, and suspension was coming after me; so I ran."

"You didn't run away?"

"Well, no; came by boat."

"But why didn't the faculty write to your father about it?"

"Shouldn't wonder if they did. Do you see this letter? Thankful whipped it out of the post-office. She's a trump. All I have against her is her hating mankind so hard that she's going to marry James Works."

"But, Keller, I don't see yet; I don't understand. You can't expect to live always up here in this attic?"

"No, ma'am. I intend to go to sea."

"To sea?"

"Yes, with Captain Rush. You know he told me last fall he'd take me round the world for nothing."

"O, Keller! Keller!"

"He starts tenth of next month. I wrote him day before yesterday, and he says, 'All right. Come ahead.'"

"Keller, do please stop joking."

"Joking, Marian? Why, it's dead earnest. What's the use for a fellow to study his eyes out, and then be suspended by the hair of the head? I'd have gone to sea long ago, if it hadn't been for making a fuss in the family."

"Have you thought of mother, Keller, poor dear mother?"

Keller writhed uneasily.

"That's all that bothers me," said he in a helpless tone. "But she won't hear of it for a long time, and then I shall write the whole story. I think mother will be reasonable. It's a great chance for me, Marian.

If I have a share in buying cotton, as the captain promises, why, I can come back and pay off my debts, and be in a fair way to set up for myself in business, and make you all rich."

In spite of her vivid imagination, Marian had a shrewd, practical little head of her own, and no great patience with Keller's vagaries. A sarcastic speech rose to her lips, but she sent it back instantly.

"I hope I shall have sense enough to hold my tongue," thought she.

"But, Keller, if you meant to sail with Captain Rush, why didn't you go straight to Yarmouth? What made you come home at all?"

"I had a kind of hankering to see the old place again! and besides, I wanted to get some of my traps."

"Hark, Keller; there's Thankful calling. Robert and Judith have come to ride with me. I'll be up again this evening, and we'll talk more. Dear me! I don't know at all what I'm about. Seems as if I must speak right out to Rob and Jude, and tell the whole story: but then I have faith to believe I shan't."

Keller had faith to believe it too. Hadn't he Marian's word?

"Don't forget to come up to-night," said he, wistfully. "Now you've once been up, I know I can't stand it alone."

"Have you had bad news from your mother?" asked Judith, as the three rode abreast through the wide street. Robert said nothing, but eyed Marian's troubled face inquiringly.

"You're the lynxest-eyed people," said she, shaking

her riding-whip. "No; mamma gains constantly. Dr. Ware is failing; but I'll not be such a hypocrite as to pretend that's what ails me. I hoped you wouldn't notice anything. Please don't ask me."

Judith reached out her left hand towards her friend with an impulse of sympathy; but Robert shook his head at her, and she drew it away again.

With that fine tact which was part of his common sense, he perceived that Marian wished to be let alone, that her troubles would not bear discussion. He began to talk to Judith about the Reading Circle, of which both the girls were now honorable members; then about Marian's three-legged horse, for Zephyr's lameness was becoming so noticeable that the fact could no longer be disguised.

Marian caught a word here and there, but it did not break up the strong under-current of her thoughts.

"Bear ye one another's burdens. I'll do it if it kills me. Those government bonds are my own. If I choose to take them and pay Thankful, my father has no right to complain. Nor aunt Hinsdale either. Mother would be glad—dear mother! It's for her sake. It's for her sake first, and then for all our sakes. He's so afraid of my father! Judgment is what he lacks; but then we must take him as he is. I did not mean to touch those bonds. It is so pleasant to think they are there in the secret drawer of my writing-desk. Aunt Hinsdale called them my 'marriage portion.' That's nonsense; still it's pleasant to think they are there. I've built so many air-castles out of them—paper castles. I thought if anything happened to my father, and he seemed low about his business, I should

just slip my arms round his neck and say, 'O, papa, dear, what's mine is yours. Here are those old bonds; they're aching for you to take them.' And then he would object, and seem very much touched. The blessed man! As if his own daughter could do too much for him. And I should insist, and it would end in my sitting on his knee and his saying, 'My little daughter has put a new heart into me. What should I have done without my little daughter?'

"But now—O, well, it is very different. I think myself it would have been better for Keller if he had come home and worked on that 'heater-piece,' as aunt Filura proposed. What does make boys behave so I can't understand. And very likely, if I give him the money, he'll do the same thing right over again, or perhaps go to sea in spite of it; slip right through my fingers. He's too proud to be suspended. And as for James Works, he ought to be ashamed to press him so. I'd wait till I was married to a woman before I went to collecting her debts!"

"O, dear! I wish I dared ask somebody what to do.—Robert," said she, suddenly looking up to the sky, where the pale moon stood blinking in the face of the sun, "do you believe James Works ever felt the least interest in that moon after he was big enough to know it wasn't a silver dollar?"

Robert turned around with a smile. It was nothing new for Marian to break in at right angles with some whimsical remark.

"Does Thankful really mean to marry that man?" said he. "Then all I have to say is, Cupid's darts have hit her in two places—the head as well as the heart."

Marian laughed.

"Yes, I thought something ailed her brain when she took to washing the barn. The dear old soul would have been married last week, only she doesn't like to leave us till Brooksey Waters can come and take her place."

"Brooksey Waters won't come," said Judith; "or, if she does, 'twill only be for a few weeks, 'just to accommodate.' I do pity you, Marian.—Why, as true as you live, I've left my scarf; my throat will be sore. Robert, you'll have to ride home and get it."

"That's always the way," thought Marian, as Robert the obedient turned his horse, and the girls followed. "She doesn't even have to say 'please.' I might have yards of sore throat, but I couldn't start Keller without what Miss O'Neil calls 'moral persuasion.' He's not the brother Robert is; yet how much he needs somebody to take care of him! Now is the time when I must decide for myself what to do. One way is to let Keller alone, and the other is to interfere, and perhaps not keep him from going to sea, either. Mother would say, 'Just think which way you suppose you will please God, and do that.' Yes, and what *could* please him better than the Golden Rule? Is it any of my business whether a thing does good or not, if it's only my duty to do it? I haven't the future to take care of. The Golden Rule it is, and no more words about it."

Aunt Esther ran out with a pair of sheep-shears in one hand, and a basket of rags in the other.

"Well, I'm glad you had sense enough to come back for your comforter, Judy. For my part, I don't see as

these rides do you a mite o' good, but the doctors have a right to their opinion, I suppose. *I* should set you to washing dishes; but then that's work, and of course you're dead set against work."

Sensitive Judith dropped her eyes in a shame-faced way; but Marian flashed back a look of defiance, and sat up wonderfully prim. It was in her to give aunt Esther a piece of her mind; but she forbore, and merely said to Robert, when he returned with the scarf,—

"Let's go by Miss O'Neil's. I should like to have her come out and scold!"

If this was a home-thrust, aunt Esther was not aware of it; for she called after them,—

"Judy, sit up straight now. Marian, twitch her shoulders back. There's no sense in her doubling into a ball."

Marian saw there were tears on Judith's checks, and her whole soul was stirred against the woman who could make that dear girl cry. For the rest of the ride, having settled her own knotty questions about Keller, she was prepared to entertain her friends, and enjoy herself. The art of having a good time, and "waking up Judith," she had reduced to a science. What if she did laugh too loud sometimes, and go off in little explosions of ecstasy over nothing particular? There can't be too much innocent fun in the world. Don't shake your heads, Mr. Icicle and Madam Grundy. If you freeze up that bubbling spring of gayety in a young girl's heart, you are as cruel as the untimely frost that nips the springing corn.

CHAPTER XX.

A SPRING FRESHET.

Miss Tottenham.

FEBRUARY 22.



HAVE been rather embarrassed lately, Miss Tottenham, not quite knowing what to say to you. I did mention in January that I heard somebody breaking into the house, and thought it was Keller; but things have transpired, since that, which make it necessary for me to hold my tongue. Whether it was Keller or not, I am pledged to secrecy.

I suppose, though, there is no harm in my saying he spent a month at home. It was understood that he was not very well. My father, who was remarkably pitiful and kind, went to Exeter, and had some conversation with the faculty; and it seemed to have a good effect on Keller's health, for he went back again afterwards, and has studied like a hero. Pitkin Jones said he heard that Keller talked of running away to sea; but Pitkin is always full of gossip.

One thing I must record : Keller has taken to loving me at a furious rate. He says I'm an angel! O, ho! Then my wings must have grown out in one day! He never saw a feather on me before!

Dear old Thankful has gone to fill a vacancy; she

has married that old widower, James Works. Farewell to Thankful the fair, and Jamie the brave. I am afraid Thankful didn't feel quite easy in her mind, or she wouldn't have chanted that doleful hymn about "The F'erce North Wind" so much. It seems as if the kitchen is full of it. Aunt Esther says she "feels ugly for Mrs. Works;" that means she pities her. So do I; but I pity myself more. Brooksey Waters came a few days "to accommodate;" but her two half-sisters were taken down with measles, and she left, no more to return.

Then I had that mulatto woman with straight false hair, Eunice Parsons. She makes me think of a molasses custard with nutmeg on it. Freckled, Miss Tottenham; a freckled mulatto. She staid long enough to break our soup-tureen, and get a silver spoon chewed up in the pigs' pail; then the rheumatism carried her off to Poonoosac.

We wanted Betsey Davis, but she said she "understood Dr. Prescott didn't have widow Works eat with the family." I told her Mrs. Works wasn't willing to eat with the family, and that was all the reason she didn't do it. But Betsey tossed her head, and said I'd "better ask Susan Kittridge," which I think was really malicious of Betsey, for Susan stood ready to come; and of all the dirty creatures! Why, she turned the kitchen sink into a perfect sink of iniquity, and you couldn't tell the dish-cloth from the mop-rag. If mother or Pauline had had the faintest idea what we've suffered, they'd have sent home some coolies. But my father has charged me never to write of our domestic trials. Little affairs he calls them. Much he knows

about it! It is such a privilege to have been born a man! How much wear and tear it saves! None of the responsibilities of life. Nothing to worry you. And here am I, with blisters on both hands, and my left thumb half cut off by a bread-knife.

Tom went for aunt Filura, and she'll stay till my wounds are healed. What will turn up next, dear knows. As for cooking, I don't understand anything thoroughly but hasty pudding; and that I'm apt to make lumpy.

March, having come in like a lion, was going out like a tiger. On the two last days of the month a heavy rain fell, and was beaten from east to west by a roaring wind. Dr. Prescott had just finished his morning calls, and was urging his horse homeward, as fast as he dared, over the black and white road,—black with icy mud, and white with whited sepulchres of snow, which broke through and let him in. Impossible to hold an umbrella against this tempest, which, even on its second day, showed no signs of abatement. The good doctor bowed his head to the gale, inwardly thankful that it was not a sickly season, and he might hope to toast his feet in lazy enjoyment at home.

But Marian was at the bay-window, watching for him.

“I’m so glad you’ve come, papa!” she cried, holding the side-door open far enough to look out, and shouting the words explosively, to be heard above the storm. “Mr. Dicky, Tom’s father, has had a fall. Sent an hour ago. But do come in and have your dinner first.”

Dr. Prescott staid a moment to drive Don Pedro under shelter, then hurried into the dining-room.

"Tom is just wild about his father," said Marian, bringing in the steak and potatoes from the warming-oven. "He begged so hard for aunt Filura to go, that she got right into Mr. Applebee's wagon and went. Mr. Applebee was the man that came. He said Mr. Dickey fell from the upper scaffold, and has been insensible ever since. And there is poor Mrs. Dickey wringing her hands, and flying round and round. Tom couldn't see any other way but he must take aunt Filura home with him."

"Yes," said the doctor, filling his plate, "the people in that neighborhood consult aunt Filura more than they do their Bibles. She is a person that looks on life from upper windows, and such persons always have great influence."

"Upper windows, papa? O, the windows next heaven. Well, she does take you right up on wings, somehow. You feel as if your troubles weren't of so much consequence as you supposed. I can't express it; but I know how she comforted us when we thought Keller was married. She sees God right behind everything; she doesn't believe there are such things as accidents, you know."

"Neither do I, Marian.

'It chanced; Eternal God that chance did guide.'

Don't forget that, my daughter, come what will. Now kiss me, and good by. No, thank you; I can't stay for the pudding. Two o'clock. Let us see. It will be lonely for you and little brother, this afternoon, in the storm. I may not get home before dark, and if

not, you'd better speak to Robert, when he brings the mail, and ask him to study here this evening."

"O, ho, who's *scat?* " said Benjie, looking up from his plate, in which he was floating a raft of bread on a small pond of sirup.

"Not our youngest, surely," said his father, laughing. "Good by, my children."

And in another moment Dr. Prescott was out again in the wildness of the storm; but now the wind had changed, and was blowing from north to south, dropping its voice occasionally, as if it had half a mind to give up the contest, then raging again with renewed force.

"It will clear away before midnight," thought the doctor, as he walked his horse over the trembling bridge. "Glad of that. A spring freshet would give these timbers a heavy strain."

Then driving on up the hill, he reflected that the ice was likely to "go out weak" this year, and there was not as much danger as usual of the old bridge. But all the while the rain was falling steadily. Marian, alone with Benjie, found the afternoon dull. Night set in, and her father had not returned. That was nothing very strange; but where was Robert, that he did not come with the mail?

She kept Benjie awake long after his usual bedtime, because she dreaded the lonesome hush which would creep over the house when he should be asleep. She sent him for apples, and he came back shouting gleefully,—

"Cellar's afloat! Tubs a-swimming!"

"Is it possible? Well, if we can't have apples, little brother, we'll have something better."

So they boiled molasses candy in a basin over the coals, and little brother helped pull it with his awkward fingers, leaving sticky traces on his face and jacket. Then they played at backgammon, a long game, for Benjie was learning, and could count but slowly. But still Robert did not come.

The clock struck nine. Benjie curled down upon the rug, to listen to the story of Jack and the Beanstalk, and in two minutes was fast asleep. Marian put more wood on the fire, choosing beech sticks because they would crackle sociably, and went to the window to look out. Nothing but blackness. Over the gate the elm tree writhed like a distracted goblin; she could fancy it wringing its hands.

She dropped the curtain, laid Benjie on the sofa, and came back to her seat in her mother's low rocking-chair. The mail was probably delayed by the storm. Robert would be in presently. He never failed to call on his way from the post-office. There was no sense in being nervous; but the wildness without and the stillness within combined to be very oppressive.

"Cellar's afloat. Tubs a-swimming."

Why, it must be a freshet. Marian hated the dull, monotonous sound of the water pouring into the cistern. It called to mind the ocean, which roared between her mother and home, and the familiar vase on the mantel—an alabaster hand holding up a shell—made her shudder, as if it were her mother's hand rising from the sea.

The clock struck ten. It was clear that Robert was

not coming: he never did come as late as ten. Marian stirred the fire, and wrapping herself in a shawl, lay down beside Benjie on the wide, old-fashioned sofa. Not that she felt sleepy; but in the dreary emptiness of the room, it was a comfort to have the little fellow in her arms. She would not put him in bed yet. Her father would be sure to come soon. Strange what had kept Robert; he didn't usually mind storms. But while she waited and wondered, that "little sprite from the land of Nowhere" glided in and perched upon her eyelids. She no longer heard the wind, though it still shook the house; nor the clock, though it never ceased to pace off the time with slow strides.

It struck eleven, then twelve. The fire burned low. A brand rolled out upon the hearth, and charred a small hole in the rug. Still Marian slept. Why not? What signal of danger could come to her dulled ears through those thick, close-drawn curtains?

Suddenly there fell a great calm. The North Wind stopped and held his breath. It may have been for horror at the ruin he had wrought; it may have been to listen to the hoarse roar of many waters. The river, which had been only little Basset yesterday, sleeping under a counterpane of snow, had swollen now to monstrous size, and was rushing headlong over his banks. On, on with the might of a conqueror, gathering force as he goes, the mad river dashes and takes to himself all that comes in his way. Great sheets of ice from far up stream he seizes, tears rudely, and piles against the piers of the bridge, tier above tier. Now, like the wind, Basset stops and holds his breath. He has de-

feated himself, and built up a wall of frozen masonry which he cannot pass over.

But a powerful reënforcement arrives. Medumpscott stream, two miles away, breaks through a strong dam, and hurries to the rescue. Now for a revel. Great logs, and shattered mills, and up-torn trees batter against the frozen wall, and it gives way. The passage is clear now for Bassett, the conqueror, the demon. He and Medumpscott rush thundering down stream, bearing their spoils, and among them the poor old tremulous bridge.

Boom! Crash! They go, shrieking,—

“Out of our way! It’s a night of revel! The law can’t touch running water. Follow us—if—you—dare!”

CHAPTER XXI.

UPPER WINDOWS.



MARIAN started up broad awake, every nerve vibrating, as if from an electric shock. In spite of the muffling curtains, a roar like Niagara filled the room. She threw up the window and looked out.

It was a dream, and she knew it. In place of the snow-covered river, she saw a broad sea of icebergs, and dancing on the icebergs, like a great wooden toy, the Quiñebasset bridge. A dream? O, yes. The Atlantic Ocean never rolled up to the door-yard before. Strange she couldn't wake! Strange the moon should be there. She certainly knew that moon, staring through the clouds with a cold face.

A feeling of terror seized her, such as she always had when Thankful chanted "The Last Days" over the kitchen stove in the early winter mornings.

"When the *f'erce* North Wind,
With his airy forces,
Stirs up the Baltic
To a foaming fury,
And the red lightning,
With a storm of hail,
Comes hurling — amain — down."

How often Marian had begged her to stop that dreadful chant! And now the whole world was roaring it. Look! the fence at the foot of the garden was quite under water. The flood was coming nearer. Marian could see it creeping up the south slope in the door-yard, faster, faster. There was but one alternative — to rush to the hill behind the house, or drown.

"O, Benjie, Benjie, wake up!" cried she, shaking him frantically.

"Let me 'lone," growled Benjie, always savage when aroused in the night.

"But you must get up, Benjie, little brother. We're going to be drowned! Do you hear?"

Benjie was fast asleep again.

"What shall I, *shall* I do?" groaned the poor sister.

Seizing him in her arms, she half led, half dragged him to the west door, and out on the porch.

Horror of horrors! A stream came "rushing amain down" through the valley, cutting them off from the hill. Marian clutched the porch railing in blank dismay, and a blind dizziness came over her. Benjie, awake at last, clung to her waist, moaning, "Mamie, Mamie!" too frightened to cry.

The situation was appalling enough to terrify stouter hearts than Mamie's and little brother's. Dr. Prescott's house stood on a narrow ridge, somewhat higher than the surrounding intervalle. This ridge made a sudden slope to the valley, a few rods up the river; and it was here that the freshet divided, to unite again a little below at another slope. Thus the house was

entirely cut off from the high land, and the water gaining on every side.

"Papa 'n' aunt Flura no business to gone off and left us," wailed Benjie, his face showing very white through the streaks of candy. "Why don't somebody see to us?"

The frightened clinging of the little arms and the despair in the young voice impelled Marian to answer, with a calmness which surprised herself,—

"Hush, little brother. God is right here. Don't be afraid."

"O, so he is," murmured Benjie, reassured. "I wouldn't wonder if he should send along a boat."

"Don't talk, dear; I want to think. Hark! There is poor Zephyr neighing in the stable. If I go to her and let her out, perhaps she can swim. Benjie, are you willing I should go, and won't you try to follow?"

"I don't want to stay all 'lone."

"But I told you, little brother, God is here. And I've just thought of something for you to do. You can go up stairs and ring the big dinner-bell out of the window. Somebody will hear it, and know we're in trouble, and come for us, perhaps."

"Yes, I'll go," said Benjie, bravely.

Marian threw a cloak over her head, for her teeth were chattering with cold and terror, and rushing to the barn, tried to push back the large door in front. She could not move it. Swollen by the rain, it stuck fast in its groove. The side door which led directly to the horse-stalls was a foot lower, and the flood was already above the threshold. If Marian had been rash in leaving the house, there was no time for shrinking

now. She lifted the latch, and groped her way to Zephyr's crib. The floor of the stable was an inclined plane, and the poor beast had crowded herself into the upper corner; but the waters were just reaching there. Marian could feel them creeping higher and higher above her feet. Quite forgetting the red cow next door, though she lowed lustily, Marian tugged at the halter, which Zephyr, in her frenzy, had drawn tight about her neck. It seemed as if the knot would never unloose; and, while Marian worked at it, the loud ding-dong from the chamber window ceased; Benjie had thrown down the dinner-bell in despair. Above the roaring of the tide she could hear his frightened cry,—

“ Mamie, Mamie, O, do come, Mamie.”

“ Coming, Benjie.”

At the last desperate twitch the knot gave way. Marian seized Zephyr by the mane, and walking through the ice-cold water, led her straight up to the porch steps. Not till then did it occur to her to wonder if she had done a wise thing. Might not Zephyr have been safer in the stable?

At any rate, if the thing had not been done, she could not have attempted it now. She had improved the last moment, and incurred a foolish risk. A little later, and the strong current must have overpowered both her and the horse. Moment by moment the already narrow strip of land on which the house stood was growing narrower still. Marian shuddered as she recalled the story of the great freshet of 1832, which had completely deluged this same intervale, and carried off the cottage where Thankful Works

was born. Keller once said Thankful had caught the freshet in her eyes, and then they had both laughed. Should she ever laugh again? If God saw and knew, why did he not send help? A boat, a raft, a live human being? O, it was very strange.

Now the waters had reached the lower edge of the porch. A poor dead lamb, separated from its ghastly flock by the press of ice, was hurled against the step. Farther out in the stream Marian saw a horse floating down, with a sleigh dragging at his heels.

For the first time it flashed upon her that her father might be drowned! She remembered there were two bridges this side of the Wix neighborhood. With a white, fixed face she drew Benjie into the house, and would have drawn Zephyr also; but the half-crazed animal paced snorting up and down the porch, and as the water broke over it, plunged, or was borne, out into the stream.

Marian saw her go without a regret. It had come to that. Zephyr must drown; but so must she and Benjie. God did not care. They need not have drowned if papa had been at home to foresee the danger. If Mr. Dickey hadn't fallen! If Tom hadn't gone and taken aunt Filura! If Robert had only come in, as he had always done before! Such a tangle of IFs! God did not care.

Hush! Yes, he did care. And like a ray of light flashed up that golden line of Spenser,—

“It chanced; Eternal God that chance did guide.”

“Yes, God does care. It isn’t a tangle of ifs. He never forgot the little sparrows; he can’t forget his

children. If we drown, it is his will. It will be *right*, for it is his will."

The water was rushing in under the doors, up through the carpet.

"Benjie, dear, O, little Benjie," said Marian, pressing him close. "Don't grieve any more. Somebody will think of us; somebody will come."

"They must've heard the bell," said Benjie, sobbing tears of sweetened water. "I rang, n' I rang, n' I *rung*. Folks in Boston heard; couldn't help it, I rung so hard."

"Benjie, we must go up stairs; the water is over our ankles. We won't drown till the last minute; we'll keep a brave heart, little brother. We know who is with us, and never forgets us."

The tone was almost joyful. Marian seemed suddenly exalted above herself, as persons of her temperament often are exalted in the presence of danger. An unnatural light beamed in her eyes as she tripped up stairs; but it was the light of a soul at peace.

"Now we'll look on life from upper windows," said she, throwing up the sash. "We're above the world, Benjie. We understand how aunt Filura feels!"

Lights were gleaming from all the neighboring houses, making intersecting paths of flame upon the moving sea. It seemed as if the river were changed into a vast harbor of illuminated ships. Or one might fancy that Quinnebasset had been spirited away, and a baby Venice put in her place.

A noisy little Venice; for now the bells began to ring, as they had not rung before since Deacon Judkins's barn was burned, and the brindled cow in it.

Marian could dimly see men running down the street and hear them calling to one another. The sight of human beings in the outer world gave her a thrill of courage which shook her unearthly calmness.

"Help! Help!" she shouted, while Benjie screamed, "Fire! Fire!"

Nobody heard, nobody answered.

Inch by inch the water was creeping up the stairs. By the light of the hanging lamp in the hall below, Marian could see it clearly, and on its surface familiar objects it had picked up in its course. The backgammon-board sailed quietly over the sitting-room threshold, in company with a charred brand from the hearth, and one of Benjie's boots. A strange fleet.

The ice without beat against the house with a dull click. Chilled to the heart, courage waning, Marian sank down upon the broad window-seat with Benjie on her lap, while the cat mewed and rubbed against her feet. Then came a crashing of glass down stairs. The flood was breaking into the lower windows. Benjie screamed.

"Darling, don't cry," said Marian, with trembling faith. "You know that God cares for the little sparrows."

"Yes, he used to; but he don't care a thing about my martins," sobbed Benjie, as the martin-house was borne swiftly past, its slender pole snapped by the rushing ice. "Martins are just as good as sparrows; but they won't have any house to go to next summer."

Marian did not answer. She only drew her little



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brother close to her heart, and waited. For what? God knew.

A heavy cloud sailed across the moon. She could not see the river bank, except where its outline was pricked out here and there by a point of light. The hall lamp burned low; but it showed the water stealing cruelly up the staircase. Marian watched it with a strange fascination, while Benjie clung to her with a clasp that was absolute pain.

“Dr. Prescott! Marian!”

The voice came to her from the darkness without. She sprang up with a joyful cry,—

“O, Robert, I *thought* you would come! Where are you? I can’t see.”

“Here, under the window. How many are there in the house?”

“Only Benjie and I. Where *is* my father?”

“Can you reach Benjie down to me? No, you can’t; it’s too far. Go across to your room. Take the light. Get out on the roof of the porch. We’ll row round and take you off.”

The boat with its two misty figures glided out of sight. Marian ran first into her father’s room, where a candlestick, with matches in its broad tray, stood on the table by the bedside, as it had stood ever since she could remember; for the good doctor never lay down to rest without being prepared to rise at a moment’s warning. Marian struck a light, and placing the candlestick upon the bureau in her own room, opened the window over the porch, and called, “Robert.” He had not come. The chilling wind blew in, and with the strange presence of mind, which

she thought at the time was not at all like herself, she remembered that Benjie's cap and overcoat were in the hall closet down stairs; but she could get him a shawl out of her own wardrobe.

"Never mind, little brother; we'll be warm, somehow," said she, throwing the shawl over his head, and pinning it under his chin baby-fashion.

The boat had come at last. She heard the splashing of oars, and climbed out upon the slippery roof of the porch, which shook beneath her from the swift torrent. Next came Benjie in his clumsy drapery, and last of all the cat.

"Move cautiously, for Heaven's sake, Marian," cried Robert; "I cannot leave the boat to help you. Be cool, and there's no danger."

Tightly grasping Benjie's hand, fully conscious that a careless step might slide them both into the water, Marian worked her slow way down the slope. In the middle of the short journey Benjie's courage failed.

"I'm scat, Mamie; I'm awful scat! Don't let's go. Do come back."

He tugged at her dress in a sort of fury. Marian felt her insecure grasp of the wet shingles giving way. A mortal terror seized her.

"I will go away and leave you alone, Benjie," said Robert, sternly, "if you cry any more. Let go Mamie's dress. Here, Marian, steady yourself by this."

And he reached up to her the blade of an oar, holding the handle firmly in his right hand, while with his left oar he fought back the flood. A moment

longer, and Marian, regaining her footing, had dragged Benjie to the eaves.

“The water-spout is strong. Cling to it, Marian.”

She did so, while Benjie clung to her. Robert quickly laid down the oars, and stood up on the middle seat of the boat.

“Hold her steady, Mr. Nason,” said he. “Now, Benjie, drop into my arms. I won’t let you fall.”

The little fellow shrank back; but Marian, letting go the water-spout, turned and reached him down to Robert, who stowed him away in the bottom of the boat.

“Now, Marian.”

And she slid down into Robert’s arms.

“Safe, safe,” thought she, with an exultant thrill.
“I thought God meant it to be so; but I wasn’t sure.”

CHAPTER XXII.

NO HEAD.



S Robert and Mr. Nason rowed the boat up the swift current, Marian sat in shivering silence, thinking how near she and Benjie had been to the upper world. For the twinkling of an eye she imagined how beautiful it would have been if she had gone with little brother in her arms. Not that she had the least desire to die; only when one has to leave this lovely world, it must be sweet to go with friends. But O, how glad she was to find herself alive!

The two men worked hard to push back the logs and blocks of ice. "If here ain't a piece of Carter's grist-mill! I believe to my soul Seven-Mile Brook has overflowed," said Mr. Nason. "This beats all." As if anything could surprise him on such a night as this. Marian twisted the meaning of the words to suit her own wild fancy.

"Have I come to the place 'where the brook and river meet'?" thought she. "Yes, I'm almost there. I never shall be a child any more. I've felt all winter that I was coming to it. Hear the oars dip and scrape. Now, when we touch dry land, I shall begin to be a woman.

*I know what it means to be a woman. It means to forget yourself, and take care of other people. It means to make your father happy; to cherish your brother Benjie; to make home just as beautiful as you can without your mother; not to mind when you burn your fingers; not to cry even when your house slips from under your feet, and floats down river; not to be *flimsy*.

"I see it all now like a picture. Every time I do my duty heartily, it makes a bright spot in my character; but the spots are few and far between, like those little points of light on the shore. Can't I see? Don't I know?"

The boat stopped with a shock which made it reel from side to side. Benjie was first drawn out, with his little feet tangled in the shawl fringe.

"Didn't know we's going to Miss ErNeil's," he muttered, angrily.

But there they were. It was the first dry land. The flood had come up to the little grass-plot which she cut for her cat, and there it was stayed. A crowd of people were gathered. Miriam saw no one but her father. He was alive, he was safe, holding out his arms to her and little brother with speechless gratitude. There were tears in many eyes, but Miss O'Neil was the first to break silence. Any mark of affection was sure to set the friendless creature to scolding; for, as she virtuously declared, she "was brought up never to kiss."

"Well, Miriam Linscott, I should think this was pretty works. You're the only one in town that needed the boat. I guess you don't know what a job it was

to pry it out of the ice. Why didn't you leave the house when you saw it was beginning to rain?"

I am ashamed to say that, in spite of herself, Marian felt that same scornful dislike creeping over her, which she always did feel whenever Miss O'Neil opened her mouth. So near death as the child had just been, so full of sublime thoughts, it is nevertheless true that at this moment she felt an impulse to seize the irritating old lady and give her a shaking. Everybody began to talk at once. "Wasn't it tough work, Robert?" "How did you get them out?" "Is the water up to the second story?" "How did you feel, Marian?" "What did you do?"

The young girl could not speak. She turned around to Robert, remembering she had not thanked him yet; but the words would not come.

There was, as she soon found, a general panic. Most of the villagers had packed all their furniture, and carried it into their chambers. She wondered she had never thought of that. Everybody had been prepared; still the doctor's house was the only one in town which had been actually flooded.

"It's my opinion that the water will stop where it is, and there won't be any more damage," said Mr. Nason.

"You don't know anything about the foreknowledge of God," returned Miss O'Neil, with a reproving scowl.

Scarcely knowing what she did, Marian found herself walking between her father and Mr. Loring towards Mr. Willard's house, while Robert followed with Benjie in his arms, and Miss O'Neil screamed after them that they ought to stay at her house; she had a

whole mince pie and a pound of sausages, and should admire to get them some breakfast.

The street was full of water, mud, and ice, as deep as the tops of the men's boots. Mr. Nason remarked encouragingly that it was "considerable scant of an eighth of a mile;" but to poor Marian it was an appalling journey. Aunt Esther gave her a warm reception of rose blankets and composition tea, while Judith, eager to express sympathy, ran round and round after aromatic vinegar, which she never found.

Tired as she was, Marian could not sleep till she knew the fate of her house. Must it be carried over the falls? That dear, dear home! She could not be too glad that her mother was spared this terrible suspense.

Presently she learned that the freshet had stopped. The men who were keeping watch of the tide-mark said the water had not risen for ten minutes; if it should not rise for ten minutes more, the danger was past. Word came next that it had sunk just a hair's breadth. When Marian heard that, she went to sleep at once, and did not awake till the next afternoon. She had no idea where she was. Benjie was sitting on the bed-post surveying her with his astonished blue eyes. She thought he was a cherub dancing a tight-rope.

"Had salt fish for dinner, Mamie," he was saying; "but if you don't get up you won't have any; they're putting it into the cellar-way."

Then Marian had to begin away back at the time when her mother went to Cuba, and follow along to Thankful's marriage, and Mr. Dickey's fall from the

scaffold, and Robert's not bringing the mail, before she could recollect last night's horror. When it did come back, it came like "the red lightning, with a storm of hail." She started up in a moment to look out of the window and see if the bridge was really gone. Yes, nothing left but the poor old piers, and those half drowned in the treacherous flood. The ice was out, but countless logs were floating down, rocking and capsizing in the rapid current.

"Where is papa?"

"Gone to Mr. Liscom's to board till our house dries off," replied Benjie, standing on his head. These sudden and marvellous revolutions in the common order of things struck little brother as amazingly jolly.

"And where is Zephyr?"

Benjie didn't know. Coolly "*s'posed* she'd gone down stream long o' the ice. Hadn't heard anybody say."

And I may as well remark, in passing, that nobody ever did "hear anybody say;" but it was easy to guess the fate of the red roan steed. Marian was nearly wild with remorse. Why hadn't she let the horse alone, as she did the cow, which had come out alive and well. Must she always act first and think afterwards? Robert tried to console her by saying she had washed her hands of a very poor piece of property. Zephyr had a cataract coming over one eye, her feet were getting useless, and her lungs pretty far gone.

"But what of that?" said Marian, indignantly. "Do we love our friends the less because they are sick? I won't hear you call my Zephyr a piece of property, and I won't take what you call a sensible view. I

loved that horse, and I didn't care whether she had any feet, or eyes, or windpipe; why should I?"

It was of no use to scold Robert, who only fell into spasms of laughter.

"Poor little red-headed Zephyr, I'd like to beg a hair of her for memory."

But that was too much. As Marian truly said, "she was no saint, she could not bear everything"—especially from Robert, who was "not a true mourner." The young man wiped the tears from his eyes, and promised solemnly he would never allude to Marian's loss from that time henceforth; and he kept his word.

For a week or two, while the house was "drying off," Marian and Benjie staid at Mr. Willard's, and Dr. Prescott at the hotel. One result of this arrangement was, that the doctor mortally offended Mr. Liscom, as might have been anticipated. He saw liquor sold slyly, and could not help expressing his mind on the subject. The doctor had very much of what may be called moral severity; he could not wink at wrongdoing, and was sometimes led to take up matters which other people regarded as none of his business.

Another result of the breaking-up was, that Marian learned a few lessons in housekeeping; that is to say, she watched the ways at the Willards', and determined to do everything just as aunt Esther didn't. But she shall tell her domestic trials in her own words.

Miss Tottenham.

April 14. It is an ungrateful question to ask; but what's the use of bread puddings three times a week? Is it "equinomical"? Aunt Esther thinks so. She

thinks it's all that keeps the Willard family together. But mother never managed in that way, and I know my father wouldn't stand it.

I am glad, so glad, we've got home. I could see we made aunt Esther some trouble, for they use different dishes when they have company. What an idea! It seems really deceitful. And it was well we came away before we got "drawn in" to a rug. She actually asked if I wouldn't give her my dress and Benjie's jacket when they needed mending again, they would make such nice "groundwork." I suppose she is the smartest woman in Quinnebasset, in the Yankee sense; but nothing would tempt me to be as smart as she is; it does make a house so uncomfortable. Only think, the Willards, little and big, are in the habit of spending their evenings in the kitchen. It's like stirring up a civil war to get aunt Esther's consent to anything else. When Benjie and I were there, Robert insisted on having fires in the sitting-room; but she said we needn't ask her to come in, she should only litter up with her rags. It was the best part of it, having her out of the way. I knew she was very much disgusted; but I shouldn't have cared a speck, if I hadn't seen that it made Judith unhappy.

Now that we have come back to the dear old home, which, by the way, is just as good as new, I mean it shall be a happy place, if it does take a dust-pan and brush. Not being very "smart," I can spend more time over things than aunt Esther does. I won't let *my* potatoes make great eyes at one another, because they haven't been pared properly. I do and will pick out their eyes, and I do and will mash them and thresh

them till they turn as white and foamy as a pyramid of ice-cream, just like Thankful's. That's easy enough. And it's easy not to wear blue and yellow calico, with your hair done in a pug, and not to cut rags! But what troubles me is how to do the cooking. Yes, Miss Tottenham.

I can keep my lamp-chimneys bright with soap and water; I can keep a gay fire and shiny andirons, and fadge up pretty things out of moss and pasteboard. You ought to see a wooden vase Thankful had a man at the Poonoosac mills turn for me. I've adorned it with decalcomania, and now the first flower that winks this year I shall catch and put in it.

Yes, indeed; as far as the sitting-room, I manage nicely. Who couldn't? My father pats me on the head, and looks pleased when he sees his dressing-gown and slippers walk up to the arm-chair the moment supper is over. Mr. Loring praises my housekeeping, though he knows nothing about it. That's what you may call bar soap, coming from a lawyer; same nature as soft soap, though. The house does look well as far as a man can see; but what troubles me is how — to do — the cooking!

I should like to feast my father royally; but I can't — on crackers. It makes me think of Hafed's Dream, where you can't tell with any certainty whether a horse is a horse, or only a "wool-ox." If I think I'm going to make puffs, the things won't puff, or they go and burst. The bread doesn't pay the least attention to the yeast, though I use the "What Cheer," which is as good as any. Then I tried biscuits, and couldn't think

what ailed them, till I found I had used cream of tartar instead of soda.

If we could only keep a girl! I've been very polite to every one that has come, and treated her like company; but it doesn't do any good. Girls *won't* stay, and when they *won't*, they *won't*, you may depend on't. My father says it is a society question, and the roots of it lie at—I've-forgot-what; but I don't see that it makes any difference where the roots lie, if you can't keep a girl.

It's my private suspicion that Thankful would be glad to come back. She looks very wistful whenever I see her, which is not often, for her husband has nailed her fast to the buttery, and keeps her making molasses doughnuts and molasses custards. That's what Mrs. Morrison, of Poonoosac, told me. Poor old Thankful! I wonder what she thinks now of my father's "candid opinion of James."

Aunt Filura comes and helps me sometimes, but she doesn't know much. She and aunt Polly live together, sort of sweet and dried up, like a couple of raisins on one stem; and aunt Polly does the housework, while aunt Filura weaves rugs. Mother and Pauline won't come home till June, and meantime I must manage as well as I can. Aunt Hinsdale sends in delicious pies sometimes, but I shouldn't dare go to her for advice, she is so correct, and seemed so surprised because I never had tried out any lard.

This is a queer world. Judith came over last night to tell me Robert had sent home a Stuart stove, and aunt Esther sent it back again because they couldn't afford it. She likes the old cracked stove, though it



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burns the top of the bread and leaves the bottom raw. Robert can't see that she has any business "taking such an interest," and is very much vexed ; but Mr. Willard thinks it is all right, and Judith never dares say her soul is her own. If she did, aunt Esther wouldn't believe it.

Well, we all have our trials. Miss O'Neil is constantly picking upon me because I didn't go to her house on the night of the freshet. She asks me if I think my mother will be brought home to be buried, or be laid beside grandma Hinsdale in the Island of Havana. My father laughs at this, but I can't: it's too malicious. Then she inspects the kitchen daily, and makes reports all over the village. She's my horror, my terror, my pestilence that walketh at noonday.

Judith says, Why do I mind her? Judith may well talk, I should think! And why do I expect to have things in perfect order? It can't be done with no head in the kitchen.

"Judith," said I, "there *shall* be a head in the kitchen, if it has to grow on my shoulders. Look at those biscuits. Putting in soda instead of cream of tartar has had an excellent effect, and I begin to be encouraged."

CHAPTER XXIII.

COBWEBS.

Miss Tottenham.

APRIL 30.

HERE isn't any head to the kitchen, and I won't boast again. I have a sore on my left forefinger. I told Benjie it was caused by mending his clothes, and that is what I shall always think.

Robert sent Judith over this morning, for he heard me say I hadn't slept a wink, though I should think he would know Judith isn't of any more use in a kitchen than a velvet rocking-chair. Not that the dear child hasn't the best of intentions; but I'll tell you what she did. She scorched her new empress cloth dress, scalded her arm, and melted the bottom out of the tea-kettle, just getting dinner. I was so sorry, for it was ever so kind in her to send me into the library to make up my sleep. I know how sensitive she is; and though my father was unusually polite, neither he nor any other man alive could eat the steak; it was as tough as burnt india-rubber.

Judith was dreadfully mortified, and after dinner she just tipped over into the clothes basket, and cried.

“If I were only like other people!” said she.

I wish she wouldn't pick herself to pieces, as if she were an eight-day clock.

"Why, you are like other people," said I, though I am afraid I didn't quite mean it, either; only I wanted to comfort her a little.

"You needn't talk so, Marian," said she, passionately. "I know just what I am; I am arm's length away from the other girls; they call me absent-minded and queer. You are the only one who really understands and loves me; and you are so bright and happy, that half the time I envy you so, it almost takes away my breath."

It distresses me to have Judith go on in that strain.

"You have everything heart can wish, Marian; you charm people. They follow you about, and watch everything you do; but, as for me, it is as much as ever they know I am in the world."

"Why, Judith, you strange girl; I never saw any one follow me about."

"Well, Robert does, for one, and Tid. Tid copies your very way of speaking; and what vexes me is, that you don't care, and don't notice it. You are used to being admired, and take it as a matter of course. If you could be in my place a week, I guess you'd see the difference."

I don't know but my father is partly right, when he says, "Judith suffers from an unoccupied, introverted mind." I am sure she imagines all this about me. I only wish it were true.

I told her it was too bad for her to think so meanly of herself. I never in my life saw anybody that didn't like her.

"To be sure," said she, curling her lip. "Nobody notices me enough to speak of me at all."

"O, but you are mistaken. Pitkin Jones said to me, only yesterday, he thought you were very superior."

I was surprised to see how Judith brightened up at that, and I couldn't help adding, "Not that Pitkin's judgment is worth much; but uncle Hinsdale said the same thing of you last week."

"Is it possible?" said she. But she didn't seem half so much flattered by that, though he is her own minister. I don't see what makes her think so much of Pitkin; I consider him flat.

Well, Judith got her eyes so red she wasn't fit to be seen, and I sent her home. Here it is evening, and I am alone. My father said he might be gone all night. Tom has been sitting on the other side of the table, perusing the almanac; but I'm glad he's gone to bed, for he smells of the barn, barny.

My finger throbs painfully; but that's nothing to Benjie's being sick. I'm afraid that child is coming down with scarlet fever; his eyes are as red as fire, and he breathes very short.

But that isn't all, nor half. When Robert brought the mail, there was a letter from Havana, which I opened, as my father always expects me to do when he is away, and it said mother was not nearly as well.

"O, Robert," said I, "you don't think it's anything to be frightened about — do you?"

He answered, in a very cheerful tone, that he didn't see why it should be. The only wonder was, that mother hadn't had any drawbacks before. But I put

the letter into his hands, and when he had read it all through, I thought his face changed.

"Poor child," said he, "how is your finger?" But he never said another word about mother.

I'm determined not to think. I've been looking out of the window; but the moonlight is so chilly! There are little pools of water in the road, and the winds set them to shivering. The skeleton trees are holding up their bare arms to the sky, just as if they were asking for something. Ah me! I keep asking for something, all day and all night; I ask for my mother. If she were here, I know I could sleep. When I was in any trouble, she used to come up stairs and comfort me.

And

"I loved her, O, I loved her so,
'Twas joy to hear her tread."

I could have a good cry, only Thankful has almost broken me of the habit. I do think it's partly a habit. It's just as well not to be flimsy. There, I hear Benjie calling.

May 1. Last night, as I was singing to little brother, who was very restless, there was a sound of wheels, and presently I heard aunt Filura's voice, saying,—

"Well, Robert is most an excellent driver, or I should have been afraid for my neck."

I danced for joy. Bless that old Robert. He was off without my seeing him. In came aunt Filura like an angel of mercy, with a striped carpet-sack in one hand and an umbrella in the other, and never so much as said, How do you do? But that is nothing strange for her. She is always so earnest about some-

thing or other, that she forgets her manners. This time it was my "runround;" and before she took off her bonnet, she had brought me a cup of ashes and water, and put my finger in soak. Then she half untied her bonnet strings, and with her bonnet dangling down her back, opened the carpet-bag, and took out a vial of goose oil and a feather, and made a dash at Benjie's nose, as if it were a rusty door-hinge. How it did rest me and soothe me to see her!

But though she calms me and calms everybody, she stirs up the furniture strangely. Things are always rattling or tipping over, wherever she goes. She took the stopper out of the camphor bottle, and then took off her shawl, and whisked it against the bottle, and tipped over the camphor. Our carpet will smell like sick headache for a week. She said, "How careless of me!" and soaked it up with her pocket-handkerchief. Then she lighted a lamp, and went to hunt for cobwebs, which, I am happy to say, I don't keep down stairs; she had to rummage the attic.

She came down with her cap half torn off her head.

"I've found a great wonder," said she.

I looked up to see what it could be, and she was holding out her forefinger for my admiration, all swathed in a slate-colored cobweb.

"See here, Mary Ann; it takes four or five thousand strands to make a fine thread like this. What do you think of spiders, with their glue-bags pricked all through with little holes?"

"O, auntie," said I, "I am afraid I don't think much about them. What are you going to do with cobwebs?"

"I'm going to stop your runround. Hold out your finger, and let me do it up with this rag."

"My father doesn't use cobwebs."

"Your father doesn't know everything, Mary Ann, not by a great sight. Where's the vinegar bottle?"

I felt relieved very soon. It didn't seem as if Benjie had the scarlet fever, now aunt Filura had oiled his nose, and I didn't feel half so anxious about mother after I had heard her say, "Spring fever, most likely. We won't borrow trouble." I slept sweetly all night. It may have been the poultice, and then again it may have been the composing draught which aunt Filura gave me, and which was easy to take, being merely a dose of advice. It is worth saving as a recipe, and I will copy it here.

Aunt Wix's Composing Draught.

"When you feel wakeful, Mary Ann, it is most an excellent plan to get to thinking about the wonderful works of the Creator. You will be astonished to find how it will grow upon you. You can't exhaust the subject. Earth, and air, and water are full of his glory. Follow the process of things up out of chaos; you're better read in geology than I am. Think how the same One who did all this is your Father; and the first you know you'll be a speck in the air, floating off to sleep.

"I am acquainted with a man who was kept awake by a nervous disease, and he followed this rule for years. It worked like a charm; and the best of it was, it made him a real good Christian."

Now isn't this a capital opiate? I don't believe my father could prescribe a better one. I took it; and after a while I had a filmy idea that my head was a spindle, and I was spinning thread out of my hair. So I may say I went to sleep on a spider.

Dear auntie made some of the yellowest, spottestest biscuits to-night. My father thought they were mine, and felt called upon to apologize.

"Filura, you must excuse Marian," said he; "she doesn't understand cooking; but I must say I never knew her to do anything quite equal to this."

It was a great joke; but fortunately aunt Filura isn't sensitive. I shall laugh myself to sleep, thinking how my father's face looked when he found out his mistake.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHANGES.

“Suffering is my gain. I bow
To my heavenly Father’s will,
And receive it, hushed and still,
Suffering is my worship now.”

JEAN PAUL.

Miss Tottenham.

DECEMBER 20.

IT is nearly two years, Miss Tottenham, since you and I have conversed. Not that I have found little to say; but my heart has been too full for words.

Grandma Hinsdale was buried nine years ago at Cardenas, not far from Havana; and there they placed the poor tired body which mamma left behind her when she passed on to heaven. A palm tree waves over the two graves, and through its high branches I seem to hear the wind sighing.

Nine years ago grandma lay down there to rest; and a year ago last June her weary daughter followed her.

Pauline says she often heard mamma whispering in the night, “Mother, I am so tired!” She never will say it again. She has gone to that pitying mother; but the breast that once cradled her is cold; the ears which listened to every sigh are forever deaf.

My own, my dear mamma! She tried so hard to live! She hoped through everything. But it came to this at last. Her tired feet will never rove again; they have reached the haven that has awaited them all these years under the sighing tree.

Did she think it was for this she went so bravely to Cuba, and ate the bread of sorrow among strangers? And is the cold home by the sea all that is left her — all?

She dreamed of warmth and sweet kisses, the loving glow of dear cheeks pressed close to her own; but all these dreams froze into ice upon her heart. Nothing is left her but that cold home by the sea.

Dear God, is that all? She trusted thee; she hoped for happy days. While it was dark, she said the sun was shining somewhere; when the cloud passed, she smiled. Papa says there was always a rainbow in her sky. She followed it to the end, and found — a narrow home.

Hush! I did not mean to talk like this. I thought I could trust myself to say, calmly and simply, that mother has gone to heaven. That is really all of it. What does it signify about the other things? She is not half so near that palm tree as she is to me.

I think I was a little wild at first. People said to me it was wicked to wish her back. I did not know what they meant. How could I help wishing her back? I said they who hadn't lost mothers needn't talk to me. I wished they would stay away. Judith was all the girl I would see, and I could not have endured the sight of her if she hadn't been motherless.

Not wish mamma back! She did not suffer very

much ; she was happy here. She would have staid longer if she only might have had leave. She was in no haste to go to heaven away from us.

I do think I was a little wild. I hardly knew what time of year it was. I didn't care much about my father and Benjie. I hardly believed in God. What should I have done if it hadn't been for aunt Filura? She let me BE crazy; she never interfered with me. "I don't see," said I, "how God expects people to love him when he treats them so."

It was such a relief to say dreadful things, for then I seemed to have emptied my heart of them, and they did not come back again to stay. I told aunt Filura it was like casting out devils. It was very strange she should have understood it so well. She never felt rebellious herself, I am sure; I hope I never shall again. It is like a bit of sea-weed fighting against the ocean — so foolish, so useless. It tore me all in pieces.

"All the way for you, my child," said aunt Filura, "is to put your arms round God's neck and call him Father."

It was just what she said to me before, when we were in trouble about Keller's marriage.

"I have tried that a great many times, auntie, and found it a comfort; but the truth is, my arms won't stay there."

"Try it again and again," said she. And I did. I had to do it. It was the only way I could get any peace. I kept saying it was right, whatever He had done; and by and by I believed it, and then the time came when I did not merely believe it or think it; I knew it.

I am not always willing it should be so. I do have such times of wearying to see my mother! Still I know just what to do, and sometimes it drowns my grief, and once in a while I go to sleep with that beautiful feeling at my heart which I tried once to tell you about—a feeling as if mother had been there, and left flowers in the room. You did not understand what I meant, but Tennyson does. These are the flowers she leaves:—

“ Pure lilies of eternal peace,
Whose odors haunt my dreams.”

Poor papa has grown old and gray. I have made a solemn promise to my own soul never to leave him. I don't see how Pauline could have gone away when the house was so desolate, and married anybody, even Mr. Loring; but papa never blamed her. She is just as kind as can be about advising and overseeing, for she lives not very far away, in a neat cottage on the Hacket Hill.

I have really taken my place now at the head of the household. I thought that night of the freshet I was standing “where the brook and river meet;” and so I was. Not that I wished it. I would much rather be a little girl, and have a careless good time; but when “Fate knocks at the door,” what are you going to do about it? I wonder now at the longing I used to have, at thirteen and fourteen, to get into long dresses! If little girls only knew how long dresses feel, they wouldn't be in such a hurry.

Papa got so discouraged going after girls, that I thought it would save a great deal of heart-burning to

give up the matter entirely, more especially since I had learned to make good bread. Mrs. Nason comes to wash and iron, and do the scrubbing, and I verily believe it is more comfortable to get through the rest of the work myself, and have it done just as I know papa likes it. If we had a girl, she would probably be older than I, and think she knew a great deal more; and really, Miss Tottenham, I don't care about being looked down upon.

Then again I must have something in my mind to *grind* except my own thoughts: if the hopper was empty, I should whirl round distracted.

Keller is at home now, preparing to go to Wisconsin, into a coal mine. It is one of the disappointments of my father's life that that boy doesn't "take to learning;" but it was of no use urging him to go to college; his face was set against it. I know how my father felt when he was obliged to give up his cherished plan. I know a great many things my father feels, just by intuition. It is because I have the same blood in my own veins, perhaps. "High-strung, like all the Prescotts," says aunt Filura.

Keller is as good and kind as possible, and loves me dearly, which is a new freak of his. I hope it will last. Two years ago he thought I was very sarcastic; and so I was, and am still. Cutting speeches are always coming to the end of my tongue, and when I do keep them back I must say I think I deserve credit.

Benjie is my darling. He shed streams of weak little tears when mother died; but how much did he comprehend? "Mamie" means almost the same as "Mamma" with him, and the dear child never will

know what he has lost. When I see how he clings to me, it makes me feel as old as the hills, and very self-important too.

I am surprised that it should be so; but as true as you live, Miss Tottenham, I am as happy as a bird. I miss mamma more and more; but except at times, I enjoy life as well as ever. Perhaps it is partly because I know I am needed. What would my poor father do without me? I am so proud, so delighted to hear him say, "Well, Miss Sunbeam, all the light of this house comes from that yellow head of yours."

I'm glad enough my head is yellow; it seems as if he warms his hands when he puts them on my hair.

Robert is studying medicine with my father, and will attend his second course of lectures this winter. I suppose there is no doubt about him; he will rise in the world. But as for Keller, one can't be so sure. Robert thinks he is developing some business talent. I hope so. Who knows but we may all ride in a gold coach yet?

I have said nothing about Judith, because I really don't understand what is the matter with her, though I fancy it is something more than a low state of the system. She sits for half an hour sometimes, looking at vacancy. If she is unhappy, I should think she might confide in me; but I ask no questions.

O, I must tell you what Thankful said the first time she visited us, after Pauline came home from Cuba. She had brought her knitting, and was to stay to tea.

"I heard, in the first place, it was you that was dead, Pauline, and I supposed it was so for as much as a

week; but when I found it was your mother, I thought I should have fainted away."

Pauline's tears were falling while Thankful spoke, but at the same time she smiled a little. Who could help it at such a singular remark?

But it was not like the speeches Miss O'Neil makes out of that cold heart and silly brain of hers. She is constantly saying things which wound me, for there is an edge of truth in them.

"Well, Miriam, your poor mother was buried in the Island of Havana. You see I was right. I told you her death might be momentous. I said so the night you had the party, and Mr. Lovell gave you that rose."

"Yes, I remember, Miss O'Neil. Please don't speak of it."

"Yes, Miriam, I should think if you had a *squeam* of conscience, you *would* feel bad to think how you tired out your mother in her last days having company. And not to wear a scrap of mourning for her either! It's the talk of the town. If *I* have *my* senses when *I* am buried, I hope nobody'll follow me to my grave with such a sinful bonnet. Blue ribbon and flowers! And that dear Mrs. Linscott gone to heaven, if ever anybody went from this town."

I am getting to hate her. It frightens me. The more I try to shake off this feeling, the more it haunts me. As my father and I sat playing backgammon the other night, I asked him if it was possible to learn to love a perfectly disagreeable person.

"Yes, after a fashion." . . .

"How?"

"Do the perfectly disagreeable person a kindness."

Then he wanted to know who it was. As if anybody alive could be *perfectly* disagreeable except Norah O'Neil.

"I'll make her a present," said I; "how will that do?"

"Humph! I'll tell you how it will do. She will take it as she takes the rent of her house—in high dudgeon. She says I ought to give her the deed of the house outright. If I can't do more than let her have a life-lease, I don't act the part of a Christian, and I shouldn't be thought anything of at Machias!"

"Well, papa, you may laugh; but I think it's enough to exasperate a saint. The time is past when these things amuse me; they just stir up my wrath."

"Tut, tut," said my father. "Don't expect figs to grow on thistles. But if you are getting into this state of mind, there must be something done about it. I can't allow my daughter to waste her animosity on a poor, witless creature like that. If you haven't grasp of mind enough, Marian, to find room for Miss O'Neil, I strongly advise your befriending her in some way for the good effect it may have on yourself. Never mind how she takes it. Do something that will really help her, and let her scold as she will."

I felt rebuked. I do suppose a person of my age ought to have more charity and forbearance.

Well, I talked with the girls, and we, being Miss

O'Neil's cordial haters, all decided that we would try the plan of making her a donation party, just to see if we couldn't warm our hearts towards the poor old thing.

She is now visiting in her paradise among the Wixes. When she returns we are to give her a Christmas party, and I will tell you how it turns out.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SYMPOSIUM.

MISS O'NEIL had just returned from her "paradise among the Wixes," and was trying to burn a stick of green wood in her air-tight stove.

"I have such good friends in the Wix neighborhood!" mused she, striking another match. "I always knew that. I start to walk up there, and make visits along on the way; and no matter how bad the travelling is, or how busy they are, I've noticed that some of them are always ready to bring me home."

This proof of the Wix friendship was so convincing, and so consoling, that the ancient dame dwelt upon it all the while the bit of newspaper was taking fire, even till the kindlings began to blaze and besiege the green wood.

"Yes, they are good friends of mine, up there. Ichabod Wix had his hands more than full, doing up garden seeds; but he said, 'he could always spare time and horses to oblige Miss O'Neil.' I sometimes wish I lived among them, they all like me so well. Dear knows, I get very little attention here in the village. In Machias, now, before that wicked Mr. McGrath cheated me out of my property, I was looked upon as

a lady. But time *relapses* on, and brings great changes. Quinnebasset isn't like Machias; the people are very different. Here is Dr. Linscott, one of the first men in town, taking a mean advantage of my slender circumstances, and renting me this house full of rats. It sounds very generous if you don't hear the wind shake the old blinds. Only a life-lease, either. If I should die I couldn't will away a single board in the floor. I have nothing to will away to anybody—I, that had a fortune once of my own! An O'Neil, too!"

With the last words the poor soul shut the stove door with an air which was nothing less than regal, and looked witheringly around the plain but decent apartment, at the school benches set in straight rows against the walls, at the vase of dried grasses on the mantel beside the photograph of the Reverend Mr. Hinsdale, and at the red and green carpet on the floor, presented last spring by some of the "first ladies" of the parish.

"Dr. Linscott wouldn't be satisfied with such a house himself, and an air-tight stove is very unhealthy. Ah, well," murmured she, falling back upon her favorite text, which she must have thought very elastic, for it fitted any occasion. "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

That seemed to settle the matter of the house and furniture; and the next grievance which Miss O'Neil took up with her basket of shavings was the wind.

"What a town this is for gales! I don't remember that we ever had anything like it in Machias. There, the neurology is flashing into my jaw again. I must tie it up before it spreads."

And festooning her head with a red bandanna, Miss

O'Neil seated herself permanently, at last, in her stuffed chintz rocker, known among the young people as her "growlery."

"It is lonesome, when the wind blows, to sit and soliloquize all alone to yourself. I should think some of the neighbors might come in. They must have seen me riding by with Ichabod Wix; but nobody cares whether I've got home or not. If I hadn't been cheated out of my property! Ah, well! The wind bloweth, and it listeth, and as the tree falleth, so it shall lie."

These little quotations from Scripture, in which Miss O'Neil indulged to such an extent, were usually very wide of the mark; still they had come to take the place in her mind of something like ejaculatory prayers; and who shall say that, as such, they were altogether worthless and void of meaning?

"Christmas is coming, and nobody has asked me to dinner. I wonder if I hadn't better go to Dr. Linscott's: Miriam is getting to be a very nice cook—only she is not agreeable in her manners. I know Mrs. Ichabod meant for me to stay there, if she hadn't been so mortified about burning the plum cake. I told her I shouldn't mind that, if the turkey turned out well; and then I said all that was proper about being fond of mince pies, and thinking everything of her family; but she was so polite that she got all of a flurry for fear Ichabod wouldn't harness as soon as I was ready for him. She thought I should feel dreadfully to be caught there in a storm, though I told her over and over again I should admire to stay all winter. She thinks they couldn't do without me here in the village; but times

have changed. I used to be invited to the first houses to eat my Christmas; but here I am now; nobody comes near me to see if I'm dead or alive."

There was a knock at the door. Miss O'Neil settled her cap and shook out her dress. "A caller, as true as I live. I wish people knew when to stay away. I should have caught a nap in about a minute; but there's no such thing as having your house to yourself in Quinnebasset."

Miss O'Neil went to the door with her sourest aspect.

"Good evening, Mary Smith. I won't call you Marie, for there isn't a drop of French blood in your veins. Walk in, child."

Marie entered very demurely, and placed a little box on the table.

"I wish you a Merry Christmas, Miss O'Neil."

"*H'm!* — O yes, thank you, dear," faltered the old lady, with her eyes on the box.

"I wanted to make my old teacher a little present," said Marie, opening the box, "and I hope you'll please accept this cap."

"Very much obliged to you, you little darling," said Miss O'Neil, extending her hand, doubtfully. "People don't think to give me presents as they used to, before I lost my property. I had presents enough then, when I didn't need them. But you always *were* a sweet child. Blue!" exclaimed she, picking at the rosette. "If there's a color I despise, it's blue; but of course you didn't know that, and I'm just as much obliged to *you*."

"Green!" interposed Marie; "green!"

"Well, it must be a very blue green, then," said Miss O'Neil, putting on the cap over her old one and the red bandanna, and surveying the effect in the glass.

"Why, it's too small in the crown, and don't come far enough forward, by two inches, to meet my front hair."

"Perhaps," said Marie, biting her lip, "if you would take off that bandage you might judge better, Miss O'Neil."

There was another knock, and Judith Willard entered, a pink glow from the sharp air relieving the moonlight paleness of her face.

"A Merry Christmas, Miss O'Neil," said she, putting a bandbox on one of the school benches.

"Take a chair, dear," said the old lady, with an uncertain smile. "If you'd wished me Merry Christmas twenty-five years ago, I might have got it, for I hadn't been cheated out of my property then."

"Miss O'Neil," said Judith, timidly, "I couldn't think what to give you; but here is a bonnet I hope you'll like."

"You dear child, you learned behavior at my school, and I'm sure I thank you kindly. This is quite unexpected."

"Marian and I made it together."

Miss O'Neil turned the bonnet round and round on her hand.

"Well, I don't think any better of it for Miriam Linscott's having a hand in it; but I guess I'll try it on."

Which she did, regardless of her muffled jaws and double supply of caps.

"Why, what a dowdy-looking thing! Excuse me, Judy; I know Miriam was the one to blame. She always goes in front of the rear."

"But, Miss O'Neil—"

"When I lived at Machias, girls, people used to come to church from a distance just to see me, there was so much said about my beauty. But who would think it now, with this bunch of furbelows stuck on the back of my head?"

The question would not admit of an answer, and the girls turned away to hide their laughing faces.

"But, Miss O'Neil," entreated Judith, "if you'll only take off that bandage, and one of your caps."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing," returned the lady, with spirit. "When I have the neurology in my face I must have room to tie it up."

But the bonnet was very tasteful, and it was evident that Miss O'Neil liked it, for she smiled admiringly, and looked very well pleased as she carried it off to her bedroom.

There was another knock. This time it was Oscar-foria, with a handsome woollen shawl of warm, brown tints, nicely shaded.

"Please accept, with the compliments of the season," said Miss Ossie, in her most graceful manner.

"Why, really, what surprises!" cried Miss O'Neil, delighted, till she remembered that Mr. Jones was the richest man in town, and his daughter might have done more.

"A shawl is better than nothing, and thank you kindly, dear. I always thought so much of your family! To be sure, I had a velvet cloak once; but that was

before I lost my property. I never expect another velvet, or any kind of a cloak, for that matter."

"I am so sorry, Miss O'Neil!" said Oscaforia, chagrined. "If you don't like the shawl, pray don't feel obliged to keep it."

"Why, Ossie, what did you expect?" said Marie, as Miss O'Neil, with the shawl still on her shoulders, answered another knock at the door. "You've had no worse rebuff than Judith and I. The old soul is in raptures, but you know it's part of her religion to make people uncomfortable."

There was a gay laugh, and Marian tripped into the room, bright and breezy. At seventeen people were beginning to call her beautiful. This was not and never would be strictly true; but there was a sparkle and a freshness in her face which charmed away your criticism. Her nose might be a trifle large, but you would be willing to have one larger still if it only looked as sensible as hers. She might have, here and there, a few stray freckles; but they paled in the glory of her golden hair, till they seemed as faint as the stars in the Milky Way. She had grown fast within the last few years, and, being straight and well proportioned, looked taller than Judith, who was half a head above her, but carried herself as ill as ever.

"A Merry Christmas, and many happy returns!" said Marian, offering to embrace Miss O'Neil, who drew back in disdain.

"O, but won't you let me kiss you for Christmas?" pleaded Marian, roguishly, which of course called forth the little frozen speech the girls had heard so many times.



"I WAS BROUGHT UP NEVER TO KISS." Page 209.

"I was brought up never to kiss."

But Marian seized her playfully by the shoulders, and pecked her withered cheek rapidly half a dozen times.

"There now, I've kissed you for Christmas, and New Year's, and Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving Day, too; and I'd like to see you help yourself, Miss Norah O'Neil."

"O, you foolish Galathian," returned the descendant of the O'Neils, actually smiling. "Your manners are so uncultivated, Miriam! You've crushed my beautiful new cap."

"She calls the cap beautiful. I told you so," said Marie aside to Oscafaria.

"See how some of my old scholars have remembered me, Miriam. Don't you admire my shawl? You would if you had good taste."

"Certainly I admire it; and pray keep it on. Beg pardon, Miss O'Neil, but the room is rather chilly, and as we came to spend the evening, mayn't I take the liberty to make the fire burn better?"

The hostess drew herself up in stately surprise; but before she had time to remonstrate Marian had run out to the shed and returned with a basket of chips and an armful of wood.

"You never could keep your place when you were a little child and went to my school, and you haven't improved a grain since," said Miss O'Neil, frigidly.

"O, you like to be hospitable, you know you do," laughed Marian; "it's an Irish trait."

"Yes," said the lady, a little mollified, "I was originally born in Ireland, and I'm proud to have it known."

"And it is known. No one who has ever seen you could doubt where you were originally born," returned Marian, with a sly glance at the girls. "But now will you please step into the bedroom and try on a wrapper you will find hanging up in your closet?"

"What! You too? I didn't expect you'd brought a thing," said Miss O'Neil, evidently delighted.

"Quick! now's our time, girls," cried Marian, as Miss O'Neil lighted a small lamp, and vanished into the bedroom.

Judith and Marie Smith hastened to the front door, and brought in three large baskets, which had been sitting outside in the snow. Oscaforia opened the leaves of the table, and covered it with a fine white cloth.

"There," said she, setting a large frosted cake in the middle, "behold a peace-offering! Now I hope to be forgiven for the shawl."

"And here is some lemonade," said Marie, producing a pitcher and glasses. "I trust it's sour enough to give satisfaction."

"Don't get me to laughing," said Judith, overturning a fruit-dish full of confectionery. "I brought this to offset your lemonade."

Marian, who had at last succeeded in building a lusty fire, stole out to the magic door-stone, and returned with a platter of cold turkey and a plate of biscuits.

"She'll say, 'You foolish Galathian, why didn't you bring a goose?'" whispered Marian. "Now let's light our four sperm candles. Quite an illumination. And the room is thawing out — don't you feel the difference, since the fire began to burn?"

"Yes, an' Miss O'Neil's poor old heart is thawing out too," said Marie, with a great gush of pity, such as she had never felt for her despised ex-teacher till she made her the cap.

"I hadn't the least idea she'd give us time to set the table," said Judith.

At that moment the bedroom door opened, and Miss O'Neil reappeared, muttering something about the bother she had had with those "mincing button-holes." It was all the fault she could possibly find with the dark-green merino wrapper, bordered with silk of the same shade; but, as the girls said, "she must find fault or die."

"What a perfect fit!" they all exclaimed.

Marian had taken unwearied pains in patterning after a gown abstracted from Miss O'Neil's wardrobe, and her success was complete, except the one mincing button-hole. The fastidious old lady, whose taste in dress was good, could not help being satisfied, and came forward now, with a stately tread and a smiling face, conscious of looking her best in her "falsest black front," and very sure she deserved praise for condescending to take off the cherished bandanna and put on the janty new cap.

"O, girls, isn't she a picture? She *was* a beauty once, I know she *was*," said Marie, clasping her hands.

"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," responded Miss O'Neil, gazing in the looking-glass with intense delight. "I always told you I was called a beauty in my day; but the young men said I had the heart of a stone. Why, girls, what have you been doing?"

"We came without our suppers," said Marian, in a tone of apology, "and we are *so* hungry! Hope you'll excuse us. Please take a chair, ma'am, and wait upon the table."

"Why, really, indeed now," said the astonished lady, sweeping a courtesy, which had been part of her stock of manners in old times, and was very graceful still. "Indeed now, this is quite unexpected. It carries me back, young ladies, to the time when my father used to give parties, before we lost our — Hark! What's that?"

There was a loud knocking, accompanied by shrill halloos. As Miss O'Neil went to the door, she saw Robert Willard, Keller Prescott, Pitkin Jones, Silas Hackett, and the new school teacher, standing in the moonlight before two ox-sleds.

"We've brought you some wood — where shall we put it?"

Miss O'Neil's nerves had been sadly tried this evening, and she did not know whether to scold the young men for the fright they had given her, or to embrace them for gratitude.

"O, my patience!" cried she; "you are so kind! but you've thrown me into a terrible flutter. I should think this was a pretty time of night to bring a load of wood. You'd better go right off, — and heave it into the shed, gentlemen."

But Miss O'Neil bethought herself, presently, that this was not a very gracious way to receive favors. True, the people of Machias would never have startled a lone woman with oxen at such an unseasonable hour; still, her shed was nearly empty, and the wood most acceptable.

"O, you lovely creatures!" exclaimed she, when the last stick was disposed of, and the young men entered the house to claim their places at the supper table, which was waiting for them. "Thank you kindly for what you've done, and may you be blessed in basket and in store. I see it has been sawed and split; is it all stove length? Now let us say grace."

The transition was so abrupt from business to devotion, that the strange guest, Mr. Fordyce Bailey, found it hard to preserve his gravity during the short blessing which the hostess asked, with her black-mitted hands reverently folded.

"Gentlemen, I've made you some tea," said she, opening her eyes, and smiling benignly. "The girls would never have thought of it; but tea is very refreshing. And here is some cream Mrs. Ichabod Wix gave me, one of my best friends. Help yourselves, do. I don't know when we shall all eat together again; and besides, I'm afraid it won't keep."

There was a sudden contortion of Fordyce Bailey's face, which came near being the ruin of the whole party. He had heard that Miss O'Neil was bird-witted, and a town-curiosity, but had not come prepared for such a mixture of graceful hospitality and child-like simplicity.

It was a royal Christmas evening for the poor old soul. Smiles wreathed her withered lips, roses glowed in her sallow cheeks, the light of other days shone in her old eyes, making it possible to believe the tradition that she had once been the handsomest young lady in the town of Machias.

"Yes, I see a little flicker of beauty there," thought

Marian. "Pity we have to grow old and shrivel up like dried apples. It must be a cross. What if one of us four girls should be left all alone in the world, and didn't even love cats? Mightn't we turn into vinegar as well as she? Always provided we hadn't sense enough to try to keep sweet."

It was a charitable question, and a wise one; but blithe young Marian had never asked it before, and would not have asked it now, if her sympathies had not broadened and deepened in the very act of fitting that troublesome merino wrapper. Never in her life before had she felt such tenderness for that "perfectly disagreeable person," Miss Norah O'Neil.

"They say the heart must have something to cherish, or 'in itself to ashes burn.' I see it all, now," thought she, with a gentle smile of pity, as the lady of the house singled her out, with her usual animosity, and paraded her faults before the company. "Let her talk; why should I care?"

"The most ungain scholar I ever had at my school, Miriam was always full of *frivolity*, making mischief and poetry. She tried to break off the match between her sister, only I went myself and joined it on again."

Marian blushed painfully, and felt as if the new teacher must be looking at her with amazement. That foolish poem! Should she ever outgrow the mortification and disgrace of it? Certainly not while Miss O'Neil lived to keep it before the public.

"The plaguy old parrot, I'll stop her tongue," said Keller, in a low voice, to Marian, who returned him a

grateful look. The time had come when she saw no reason to envy Judith the brother-love which had once seemed to be left out of her own lot. Keller was now her devoted champion and friend, and had been ever since she appeared to him that day in the attic, like a good fairy with a golden halo round her head, and dropped loving words, like balm, into his sore heart. He came to her rescue now, though the way he did it may be open to objections. It was by setting Miss O'Neil to talk of her lovers, an imaginary host, which she marshalled forth occasionally to kneel at her shrine, and bewail her "heart of stone."

Merriment ran high. These fabled lovers were the choicest fun in Quinnebasset. The naughty young people kept up a mathematical calculation as to the rate in which the number increased, and declared that Miss O'Neil had begun with six, and got up to thirty, cutting every lover in pieces five times—a slashing process, but perfectly harmless to ghosts.

I do not uphold the Quinnebasset youth in this thing; but if there was any excuse for them, it was in the satisfaction it gave the poor withered old crone. While she talked, she looked and felt herself a queen of society. And every shadowy lover she evoked and rejected was a clear gain, for he never dropped out of her memory afterwards, but helped to swell the list of the slain.

She went to bed that night in charity with the whole world; and so ended the tea-drinking, or, as Fordyce Bailey classically called it, the symposium.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST LOVER.

BUT it seems that while Miss O'Neil was thus calling up the shades of lovers past, lovers present were improving the opportunity to whisper a few words in one another's ears. At the close of the evening, Judith, looking strangely fluttered and half frightened, took Marian one side, and said to her, "I'm going home with you to stay all night, and Robert must go with us. I won't have any one else."

"Very well," replied Marian; "I'll send Keller out of the way." But what it meant she did not know.

As she, and Robert, and Judith walked along the crisp road,—there was no sidewalk in winter,—Judith was perfectly mute, and to call attention from her, Marian talked with great volubility.

"What a handsome young man Mr. Bailey is! And so well behaved! I fancy him very much indeed."

"Do you? Well, I can't say he is exactly my style," returned Robert, and next moment, ashamed of himself, added, "though I won't deny he has the air of a gentleman."

"Of course he wouldn't be your style, unless he were as deep as the Pacific Ocean," said Marian. "You are a dreadful critic, Robert. Do look back and see

Keller. He is up to some mischief, I know, by the way he swings himself round."

Keller was sauntering a little behind with Mr. Bailey, saying confidentially and with animated gestures,—

"By the way, Bailey, you're a stranger here, and I don't know but I ought to say a word to you about these Quinnebasset girls. Don't let it go any farther; will you? They're the nicest creatures in the world; but the fact is, just between ourselves, a fellow has to walk on eggs or they think he has serious intentions. The *best* girls in the world; sensible, too; but — well — rather too susceptible, as you may say. A word to the wise is sufficient. You understand, hey?"

"Why, yes, I think I do," stammered young Bailey, looking, as well he might, a little surprised. "They don't appear like that sort; but I'll have my eye out and be careful. 'Twould be a confounded scrape, wouldn't it, though, to enlist any of their affections accidentally? Much obliged to you, Prescott, I'm sure."

"Well, *you're* a donkey," thought Keller, chuckling behind his comforter. "Thought I'd sound you and see."

And ready to explode with suppressed laughter, he continued to expatiate upon this amiable weakness of the girls of Quinnebasset, which ought to be respected, he said, and by no means divulged to the unfeeling world. How the girls would have longed to box his ears if they had heard him! A more refined and intelligent set of young ladies could hardly be found in a New England village, as nobody was better aware than Keller; but a joke was sweet to his soul, and the temptation to sell a donkey not to be resisted.

"Now the deacon is sick, and you're obliged to change your boarding-place, Bailey, I hope you'll find one where there aren't any girls; I advise it as a friend."

And marching the new teacher up to Deacon Judkins's door, Keller left him to his own reflections, and ran home, fairly weak with laughter. The girls had already gone up stairs, but they could hear him chuckling to himself in the front hall, and going off in little bursts all the way to his chamber.

"Marian," said Judith, as they were disrobing for the night, "I have such a strange thing to tell you. I was in the kitchen at Miss O'Neil's, you know, putting up my basket, and Silas Hackett came out, and — and —"

Marian made an inarticulate response with her tooth-brush in her mouth. If she had only looked up and seen the bright spots burning in Judith's cheeks, she would have felt more curiosity as to what was coming.

"He said he — he — Why, Marian, did you ever think of such a thing as Silas Hackett's caring for me — particularly?"

Marian wheeled round, and levelled her tooth-brush at Judith.

"What!" exclaimed she, staring in bewilderment.

Judith stood combing out her long dark hair, and looking straight before her at the lamp, with a shy, triumphant sparkle in her eyes, somewhat at variance with the regretful tone of her voice.

"Yes, it is nothing new, he says; and I'm afraid it's very, very serious. What in the world shall I do with him, Marian?"

Marian braced herself against the closet door before she ventured to reply. In the little interval since Ju-

dith had first spoken, a change had passed over their relations to each other. A real live lover had come between them, investing the once familiar friend with a new and mysterious dignity.

"Why, how did Silas happen to think of such a thing?" said she, at last. "He has always known you just as well as can be. Wasn't it a funny idea, his starting up all at once, in this way? How did he look? What did he say?"

Marian was not aware of it, but she spoke with some deference, as well as a slight shade of pique. In everything heretofore she and Judith had been equals; but here was something they could not share, something that might not be held as common property.

"I don't think I could tell you exactly," replied Judith, her eyes still fixed on the lamp. "He looked very foolish indeed, and made some remark about the levee next week, what a nice moon there would be; and right off upon that, told me he had been thinking of writing me a letter. 'Ah!' said I; and then I looked up in his face, and said, 'O!—' Dear me, I don't know how to repeat it, Marian; but the truth is, this has been going on for some time, though I didn't really suspect it, or anything. He thinks I'm something wonderful, a great deal better than I really am." And Judith gathered courage to move her eyes towards Marian, as she added, with a look of vast experience, "That is always the way, you know."

"Yes, I suppose so. I don't know anything about it," was the meek reply. "But, Judith, what could you say? It is such a pity about this, for I am sure you don't care for him, and it's too bad to hurt his feelings."

"Hurt his feelings! That's a very mild way of putting it. Break his heart, you mean."

"No, I don't — that's all nonsense," returned Marian, bluntly, as she unfastened her boots. "Such things don't happen nowadays as broken hearts. I guess Shakespeare knows. He says that men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

Marian might not understand mankind, but she knew a little of the genus, second-hand, from Shakespeare.

"Ah, but, Marian, Silas never cared for any one before! He says it's something he can't account for, but so it had to be. And now the question is, what shall I say?"

"Why, haven't you said anything yet?"

"No; I told him I'd think about it. I don't know my own mind."

"Well, there!" exclaimed Marian, somewhat recovered from her first awe and humility. "I should think you'd know your own mind like a flash; *I* should. If a young man were to come into that gate to say such a thing to me, I should have a feeling in one minute, whether it was to be yes or no."

So spoke Marian from the inmost depths of self-ignorance.

"Wait till you have the trial of it," returned Judith, from the sublime heights of experience.

And so the girls talked on and on, their faces pressing the same pillow, while the mercury sank lower and lower, and Jack Frost embroidered the windows with etchings which shut out the cold moon and the ruddy Northern Lights. But, confidential as they were, they

did not fully open their young hearts to each other: who ever did it yet? "We are spirits clad in veils." Judith carefully covered up the fact that her first girlish fancy had been given to Pitkin Jones, a person on whom her friend looked with some contempt. She knew it was an idle dream, which ought never to have found its way into her head; for the youth with ambrosial locks had plainly never spent any thoughts on her.

"O, no, I couldn't talk to Marian about that, she is so much like a child in some things. She wouldn't see how it was possible for me to care for a person who didn't care for me. As if that weren't the very bewitchment of it! or I begin to think it is. She's too high-minded, or cold-hearted — which is it? And as I've kept the secret a whole year, I won't lisp it now. More especially as I shouldn't wonder if it was half imagination, after all."

While Judith was thinking thus of the indifferent Pitkin, but talking only of the enamoured Silas, Marian, for her part, mused in this wise:—

"How strange it must be to have any one think of you in that way! How beautiful! But there is something about these things I do not exactly understand, and I presume I never shall. I wouldn't say it to Judith, but in my French, the other day, I was struck with a remark of Corinne's. She said she had a conviction that she should never be able to love anybody with her whole soul, and she was sorry. I have had the same conviction myself, ever since I can remember; or seems to me I have. But I couldn't tell this to Judith: it would give her a chance to say, 'Of course you'll never love

anybody, if anybody never asks you to!" She does feel a little, just a little, self-important."

"Judith, what think now about being uninteresting, and people's hardly noticing you are alive?"

"I think the same," replied Judith, serenely; "this is an exception. But, honestly, dear, how *do* you like Silas?"

"You needn't ask my candid opinion," laughed Marian. "I'm not to be caught in that trap again. I suppose you expect me to say he's a perfect jewel; and so he is, if anybody fancies him."

And Marian went on with her unspoken thoughts:—

"Young men are not very interesting, as a general thing, and I never could make up my mind to like any one that didn't keep his finger-nails nice. I hope Judith won't talk any more, for my eyes are drawing together."

"But, Marian, as for fancying Silas, I must confess I always thought he was rather awkward. If it is anything, it's his real worth, you know. And isn't that better, after all, than elegance? I'm sure Robert would think so. How do you suppose Robert would like it? Marian, Marian, why don't you speak?"

The only answer was Marian's quiet, regular breathing, which told unmistakably that she was not in a condition just now to discuss affairs of sentiment.

"What a girl!" thought Judith, rather mortified. "I wonder if she has any heart,—except for her friends, of course."

And upon that fresh wonder she herself sailed off to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POTATO PAN.

Miss Tottenham.

NEW YEAR'S EVE. My father and Keller have gone to a lecture, and I am sitting by the fire, with my feet upon the fender, and my writing-desk in my lap, while Benjie kneels on an ottoman playing jack-straws. The large yellow flames are ascending from the sticks of wood, then darting back fitfully, as if they almost wanted to get out of their chimney-prison, but a gentle human pity drew them downward continually.

It is a cheerful room in which I sit, for it is our own sitting-room at home, and home looks out from every object on which my eye rests. It is evening, and the German lamp burns with a soft light upon the centre-table. Even that mild radiance has a ray of home. The curtains are looped over the resters in the usual home-fashion, and the windows let in gleams of a clear moonlight evening, which is shining out of doors. At short intervals, I hear the merry sound of sleigh-bells ringing out very clearly in the still winter air, and now and then a few indistinct words reach my ears, spoken by merry sleigh-riders, who go whizzing by, with hearts

gay enough to keep them warm, though it is so cold to-night.

I am very happy, Miss Tottenham, and very much at home, with the moonlight looking in through the parted curtains; with the soft beaming of the lamp, striving to outdo the moon; with the crackling, jolly fire, leaping up so aspiringly to outdo the lamp; indeed, with the whole home altogether.

Who would think that, with my dear mother "lying in her white sleep," I could ever be so happy in this house? But I only think of her as staying away in that "high country," where it may be she can look down on me and watch all I do. At any rate, whether she can see me or not, I shall tell her all about it by and by. How much I shall have to say, and how she will fold me in her arms and kiss me, and how I shall laugh and cry on her neck! It is such a weary, weary while since that morning she drove away, and I watched the little window in the back of the carriage till it was only a speck. She is the same woman she was then; for waking in the likeness of Christ cannot change one's identity. She has a gentle voice, and dark, wavy hair, and brown eyes, warm with love, or it is not my mother.

Judith longs to know how heaven looks, and what the angels are doing; but I do not feel so at all—I want to keep it for a surprise. My only concern is whether I shall ever get there. I am glad it doesn't depend upon poor me to build a bridge of my own good deeds, and try to walk to heaven on it, for it would let me through like a cobweb. No, it is only the infinite mercy that will ever take me there, and that I know more surely every day of my life. Strange, that those

gates, which the whole world could not move, should open from within just for the asking!

This is the last night of the year. I ought to feel solemn, but I can't. The people riding by in sleighs are going to Poonoosac to dance the New Year in. How many ways they do contrive for welcoming the poor young thing! They dance him in, shoot him in, and ring him in with wild bells. I can't see the need of it; for to my mind, he is anything but bashful. He comes blustering along, blowing his fingers, as if he cared for nobody and nobody cared for him. I have a particular spite against him. He is always the means of my making a thousand new resolutions, which is about the same as telling myself a thousand lies. Now, that's wicked. Just for the novelty of it, I mean to begin this year with only one promise, and see if I can keep it—the promise not to build air-castles. Between you and me, Miss Tottenham, I find I am beginning to have some of the silliest, flimsiest thoughts. Let's stop it at once. Do you suppose Judith's love-notions are catching? I have been reading "The Marble Faun," and day before yesterday, while I was feeding the hens, I fancied myself Hilda with the doves flying about my head. And where was Kenyon? That wonderful coming man, I mean, whatever his name is? And how would he look when he came? And all that nonsense. "He'll have only one fault," said I; "he'll think too much of me; but I'll try to forgive him for that."

I suppose the hens were cackling on a high key; but I paid no attention, for I was thinking about that man of straw, and how he would beg me to go with him;

when suddenly it occurred to me that I had made a resolve not to leave my father.

"Go away," said I, bitterly, to my lover. "Go away — it is of no use to urge me. My heart is yours, but duty compels me to stay with my father. Go, go!"

I was flourishing the potato pan at him, and he was looking at me with a face of anguish, when my father rode into the barn, and I jumped and screamed, tipping over the pan, potatoes, johnny-cake, and all. How long I had been holding it out at arm's length I don't know. My father looked at me keenly, and said he, —

"That's a very good imitation of Judith. But mind you, my dear, day-dreaming won't do for *my* daughter. If you're out of business you'd better wash the barn floor."

He spoke in a laughing way; but I know he meant it, for he said last night, after my geometry lesson, —

"Well, dear, are you pretty busy these days?"

"Why, yes, sir. Mrs. Nason, Tom, and I have been cutting meat for sausages, and to-morrow I'm to boil pumpkin, and bake brown bread and beans. This is a work-a-day world, papa, and I don't get much time to be idle."

"Glad of it," said he. "Keep moving; that's the way to grow. Did you ever hear the wise Frenchman's three rules for happiness?"

"No, sir. I don't see what any one needs of rules; it's happiness enough just to be alive."

"Some people think differently," said my father; "and the rules are worth remembering. The first is

occupation, the second *occupation*, and the third and last is still OCCUPATION."

"O," said I, "then I've been living by rule, papa, and didn't know it."

"Yes," said he, laying his hand on my head, as he often does, as if he were asking a silent blessing over it. "Yes, daughter, I am glad there is a work in this world for you, as noble as ever a woman found to do—that of making home happy. But there is one thing I wish you to remember. Live in the present. Do the nearest duty, and don't let your thoughts dwell too much upon dream-love and shadow-heroes."

I blushed crimson at that. How happened he to be so wise? Was it my tipping over the potato pan?

"It is the most natural thing in the world, my child, that girls of seventeen should anticipate these matters; and your father is the last person who would blot out of your life the beautiful experience of love which is to come by and by. But let it be of the Lord's sending, Marian. Don't soil the white page of the future with vain imaginations. It will be spread out before you, one line at a time; read it as it comes."

"Yes, papa," said I, not daring to look in his face.

"I will tell you a secret, my daughter. You are more likely to marry, and marry happily, if you think as little about the matter as possible. I have good reasons for what I say, but it is not necessary to give them now; we have talked long enough on the subject, perhaps. The truth is, I see so much silly, idle sentimentality among girls of your age, that I wanted to throw out a little word of warning. *My* daughter mustn't be senti-

mental! She must cherish no unquiet wish for blessings not yet ready for her, but try to say,—

‘Henceforth my one desire shall be,
That He who knows me best should choose for me.’”

Now, wasn't that a queer way for papa to talk to me? It makes my cheeks tingle when I think of it; but I'm glad he did it. I don't think I have become what Miss O'Neil calls *lacsadaisical* yet; and now, as Thankful says, “I *certain* shan't.”

Mr. New Year, let me shake spiritual hands with you. Ugh! how cold you are! Here's hoping I may keep my promise, and be able to look you in the face when you are dying of old age, twelve months from this time.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“LOVE-SHAKED.”



JUDITH entered the kitchen at Dr. Prescott's one evening, with a look on her face which told that she had something to say. Her large dark eyes were unusually lustrous, and about her sensitive mouth played an uncertain smile, hovering, flickering, dying out, and coming again. Tom sat by the stove splitting kindlings, while the milk, which he had brought in half an hour ago, stood on the drop-table, with its foam gradually settling, for like “the quality of mercy,” it was “not strained.”

“Where is Marian?”

“Don't know. Hain't seen her since I came in from milking.”

Judith ran up the back stairs with remarkable speed. As she approached the door of Marian's room she heard Benjie saying, in a querulous tone,—

“Don't rub me *very* hard, Mamie; I'm a *little* sore all over.”

“Come in,” said Marian, in answer to Judith's knock. “Why, I thought it was Pauline, the step was so light and quick. I'm giving little brother his Saturday evening bath, and it seems as if I should never get

all his sore fingers done up, and his little bruises taken care of."

"*Men* have to bear everything," burst forth Benjie. "My skates are too big, and they wobble and fall me down on the ice, and then Hen Page keeps a-punchin' me so I can't get up."

"O, fie, little mannie!" said Marian, with a warning glance at Judith, who was on the point of laughing. "We keep a brave heart, you know, and don't tell of our troubles, and then we forget them."

"Men have worse times 'n women do, so now!" said Benjie, defiantly, as he slyly wiped his eyes on one of his bandaged fingers, and subsided into his flannel night-gown. "I'm blacker 'n bluer 'n ever you was, Mamie, you bet."

Little brother was not usually allowed to talk slang; but considering his present damaged condition, Marian prudently winked at his sins, and, dancing him off to his own room, put him to bed in a warm blanket.

"Don't you think Benjie is a very troublesome child?" said Judith, following her friend down stairs, to watch her strain the milk, and mix buckwheats for breakfast.

"No; I'm sure I don't!" was the quick reply. "He is delicate and sensitive, and needs a great deal of care; but I love him all the better for that."

And as she spoke, Marian picked up the child's cap from the kitchen floor, and hung it on its nail, with a motherly pat.

"Well, I think you fuss over him more than you need to, dear; and so does aunt Esther. But I must

say you make him mind beautifully. How do you manage?"

"I don't manage; I don't know how. We love each other, and hate to hurt each other's feelings, and that's all there is about it."

Judith thought of her own little brothers at home. She had never been harsh with them; her disposition was certainly more amiable than Marian's, yet they did not love her and cling to her particularly. Why was it? After all, it was rather nice that they didn't.

"I've been longing all day to see you," said she, when they were at last in the sitting-room, and Marian had taken out her tatting.

"Have you?" said Marian, her little rosy finger-tips and almond-shaped nails flashing back and forth with the tatting-shuttle.

"Yes," returned Judith, folding her nerveless hands, which were rather sallow, and showed the veins too clearly. "Yes; for it's all settled."

"Settled! How? What?"

"I'm engaged."

Marian gave a diminutive scream, and dropped her work in her lap. "Why, Judith Willard, you told me only last week you didn't care at all for Silas Hackett. Haven't you changed your mind very soon?"

There was a sudden drooping of Judith's head. It was a very large head, and always seemed too heavy a responsibility for her slender neck.

"I don't know whether I've changed my mind or not, and that's the worst of it," sighed she.

Marian fixed her eyes on Judith's face in dumb surprise. A fine face it was, in spite of its moonlight pale-

ness, one you would turn to look at a second time, and still it might not satisfy you entirely. There was thought in it, and feeling; but something seemed to be lacking. The mouth, though sweet, was rather weak, perhaps.

"You haven't the least idea how I've puzzled my brains over this, Marian. I couldn't eat or sleep till I'd made up my mind."

"What was Silas's hurry?" asked Marian, coolly. Judith had never been able to make her comprehend the situation.

"You talk like a child, Marian. Just as if I could keep him waiting forever."

It was not the first time since the advent of the new lover that the old friend had been called a child, and it did not please her very well.

"At any rate," said she, with emphasis, "Silas isn't so old but he might wait a while, and I wouldn't say 'yes,' when I only meant 'may be so.' By and by you'll change it to 'no,' and then people will call you a flirt."

"Marian Prescott, aren't you ashamed to talk so to me? As if I would break my word on any account, my sacred word! Besides, I do love Silas very much."

"O, you do, do you? Then it's all right."

"I mean I'm beginning to. I wondered and wondered, you know, and couldn't be sure, till, night before last, at the lecture, don't you remember he passed right by me in the vestry, and walked home with Marie Smith? Well, I knew then, by the way I felt, that I really did care for him, for I was as jealous as I could be."

Marian looked relieved. Judith's words seemed to have the true ring now, for she had heard that love and jealousy always went together. What if the girl did say last Monday she "wished Si Hackett was in Botany Bay"? That was probably a good sign; Marian presumed it was. And, a little afraid of being snubbed again as a child, she sat in discreet silence, looking timidly at her friend, to see what she would say next.

"Yes, I'm sure it's all right," continued Judith, raising her chin with more confidence.

"I thought you were going to talk with Robert."

"O, I did, and he said nothing could have suited him better."

"I knew he'd say that."

"Yes; and that was one reason—I mean, I was very, very glad to have Robert pleased. It isn't everybody he likes, you know."

"And of course Silas is pleased too," ventured Marian, thinking she must be safe in saying as much as that.

Judith answered by a meaning smile, implying that words were too feeble to express Silas's rapturous condition.

"I don't know, upon my word, what would have become of him if I'd said no."

Marian's upper lip curled a little; it was the worst fault with her mouth, that that upper lip did curl so easily.

"Silas has a good constitution, Jude,"—this was what she longed to say,—"and I guess 'twould take more than No to kill him."

But she tatted very fast, and said nothing; and presently, when Judith went on to repeat some of the young man's words, and to hint at his gratitude and happiness, she let her work fall slowly out of her hands, and sat looking reverently at her friend, as a glowing worm might look at a star.

"Perhaps men *have* died from time to time, and worms *have* eaten them, for love," thought she. "It is just the most beautiful thing! I should think Judith would feel perfectly happy; but she doesn't."

And the fact that Judith could be the object of such adoration, and *not* be in ecstasies, completed Marian's astonishment.

"May I mention this to any one?" asked she, after a few moments of awe-struck silence.

"Certainly; I'm willing, and of course Silas is," replied Judith, arousing herself from a dream.

Marian mentally resolved to tell her father and Keller at the first opportunity. How amazed they would be! It was only a few days ago that her father had spoken in such a patronizing tone about love affairs, as if they were things a long way off in the future, which "*my daughter must not think about yet*"! And here was Judith, only eight months older, an engaged woman in good and regular standing. What would he say to that?

The doctor set down his coffee-cup suddenly, when he heard the news, but had the presence of mind to pass the sirup to Benjie.

"'Saturday dreamed, and Sunday told,'" began Keller.

"No, indeed!" returned Marian, triumphantly, from

behind the coffee-urn. "There is no dreaming about this; it's a positive fact."

"Poor Si! *He's* a goner, then!" muttered Keller, under breath. "Whew!"

"What do you think of it, papa?" asked Marian, stirring the cream, with a very mature air.

"I think Silas Hackett has made a fool of himself."

"Now, father!"

"Excuse me, daughter. You know I never did see Judith with your eyes. Silas Hackett is an enterprising, sensible fellow, and I feel an interest in him, and wish him a better wife."

"I'd as soon marry a baby as Jude," put in Keller, with biting sarcasm.

Marian's cheeks burned indignantly, but she would not deign a glance at Keller. Nobody had asked his opinion.

"I am surprised at both of them," remarked the doctor, after a pause. "I should think Silas had too much practical common sense to fancy Judith, and Judith not enough to fancy him."

"O, father Prescott!"

"It never'll amount to anything," said Keller, delighted, to take sides with his father. "Jude's too slack-twisted to go through anything she undertakes. She always leaves off in the middle."

"That from you!" Marian longed to say, for Keller never seemed to be aware of his own want of stability. But the daughter of the house was learning to avoid cutting remarks.

"Let's see — how old is Judith?" asked the doctor.

"Eighteen this month, papa; and *thinks* she is old

enough to know her own mind," was the dignified reply.

"Poor motherless child!" said Dr. Prescott, in a softened tone.

And after that he finished his breakfast in silence, and nothing further was said by any one about the new engagement. Upon the whole, the announcement had not been as triumphant as Marian had expected.

The winter had opened very gayly, but now it was likely to be rather dull. Keller, after Marian had nearly worn out her left forefinger making red shirts, suddenly tired of the idea of Wisconsin coal mines, and wouldn't go. But when he saw Silas Hackett starting for the lake to fell timber, he was eager to follow. "And by the way, it would be such a pity to waste the red shirts." His father consented at last, perhaps with the secret hope that "tending sled" might reconcile the boy to the sad fate of going to college.

Keller set out for the woods in high spirits, he and Silas clad in red shirts and striped blouses, and cracking jokes all the way to Tomhegan township. Very soon after, Robert went to Brunswick, to attend medical lectures, and Pitkin Jones found business in an insurance office in Hartford.

Judith bore Silas's absence with great fortitude. Indeed, she told Marian she believed she liked him better when he was away from her, for then she could idealize him, and forget some of his peculiarities which annoyed her. Marian thought this rather odd; but then Judith herself was odd, and everything about these things was a mystery to inexperienced young Marian.

Aunt Esther did not like the engagement, and said

Judy would make "a poor stick for a farmer's wife." The child had always weighed on her mind, and to cure her of natural lack of "gumption," and teach her general housework, the good woman had scolded hard enough, if that were all. She had scolded, and Tid and Mate had grumbled; but somehow they three always did the drudgery — never Judith. Not that Judith really meant to shirk, but while she was getting ready to do a thing it was already half done by some one else. This was a great pity, for Dr. Prescott was right when he said, if her mind had been more occupied it would never have become so morbid. It was she who needed the Frenchman's three rules for happiness, not Marian.

Aunt Esther was so "'palled" at the thought of an engaged girl's not knowing how to make a decent loaf of bread, that she scolded harder than ever, to atone for lost time. But scolding had a bad effect on Judith: it drove her to the solitude of her own chamber, away from uncongenial people, there to brood over her wrongs, and sometimes give vent to her wounded feelings in verse. Some of Judith's poetry had the real poetic fire, for uninteresting as I fear she seems to you, she had fine powers of mind, and with proper training might have made a very different girl.

She told Marian she knew it was her destiny never to be happy, though she thought very likely she might one day be famous. There were thoughts growing in her brain which she should give to the world, and in return the world would give her a name.

"Don't talk so," said Marian; "it makes me shiver to hear you. Just as if you were going up on a moun-

tain to turn into a statue! Besides, what will become of poor Silas while you are up there?"

"As true as you live, I forgot there was any such person," replied Judith, with a start, like a medium coming out of a trance. "I tell you, Marian, a girl can't always keep it in mind that she's engaged."

"No, I suppose not," returned Marian, doubtfully.

Aunt Esther was not the only one who disapproved of the engagement. Dr. Prescott frowned upon it too. He said if Judith would throw off her masterly inactivity, and try to fit herself for a good wife, he might approve of it; but instead of that, she appeared to be "love-shaked," walked like one in a dream, and fed her mind on novels. He did not like her influence over Marian, and perhaps nothing but his respect for Robert kept him from laying down pretty strict rules against the intercourse between the two girls.

"What do you think?" said Judith, coming into the kitchen one morning, when Marian, with a blue sweeping cap on, was stirring up a cottage pudding. "We are going to have a boarder!"

"A boarder? Who is it? I desire to know."

"The new teacher, Mr. Fordyce Bailey," replied Judith, with some animation. "Deacon Judkins is so sick he had to go somewhere, and aunt Esther thought we'd better take him. She likes him; she says he knows how to hold his tongue."

"But when he does talk, Jude, it's in Johnsonese — such big words as symposium and coruscation. And then he parts his hair in the middle. The more I see him, the less I like him," said Marian, swinging open the oven door.

"Nonsense! I presume he has a widow's peak, and is obliged to part his hair in the middle. I hope that little remark Robert made the night of the O'Neil symposium hasn't turned you against him, child."

Marian thrust her pudding into the oven disdainfully. Did Judith think she couldn't form her own opinions without the aid of other people's brothers?

"But I don't see why aunt Esther takes him. I should think he would interfere with her making rag carpets."

"Well, Marian, between ourselves, I suspect it's because we have such quantities of meat laid down in snow, and she's expecting a February thaw."

Marian smiled back a look of intelligence. Being a housekeeper herself, and knowing aunt Esther's frugal turn of mind, she saw the full force of the remark.

"I am rather glad he's coming," yawned Judith. "He'll help pass away the winter. I know you don't mind it, but Quinnebasset is dreadfully dull."

"The winter is nearly gone," said Marian, thoughtfully cutting up pieces of butter on a platter, ready for the steak she was about to broil. She was wondering whether she might not find it disagreeable to be continually meeting the new teacher, whenever she ran into Mr. Willard's. The idea of staying away from Judith on his account did not occur to her; though possibly it might if she had known the warning Keller had given the young man concerning the Quinnebasset girls!

CHAPTER XXIX.

“WORSE THAN NONE.”

ORDYCE BAILEY was small and dapper, dressed with great care, and sported a cane and a wise-looking pair of spectacles ; had hair the color of a blood-orange, parted it nearly in the middle, and was letting it grow out to a poetical length down his neck. He was more than straight ; he bent backward. He had an uncomfortable habit of staring you full in the face, which was rather embarrassing, but in other respects he seemed to be very well bred. He had divers gifts of mind, but no common sense ; good principles, good habits, a “faculty for government,” and some book knowledge ; yes, but a “handful of common sense is better than a bushel of learning ;” and a handful he hadn’t, or even a thimbleful. But something else he did have, which made him quite as comfortable, and that was self-esteem. Coleridge tells us of a man who thought so much of himself that he almost took off his hat whenever he said, “I.” Mr. Bailey might have been the man.

He came from Boston, and brought such a knowledge of metaphysics that Mr. Hinsdale couldn’t speak before him. He also understood “elective affinities,” and everything else that is worth knowing.

Aunt Esther was mistaken when she thought him so quiet. She had seen him but once, and that was at a parish gathering, or sociable, where he was taking notes privately to send to a newspaper. He was a great talker; but Keller Prescott's alarming description of the Quinnebasset girls had put him on his guard. He knew he was very fascinating, but he didn't mean to be; he wanted to walk in the straight path of duty, and break as few hearts as possible. So you see he was really conscientious. It would have been safest to shut himself up entirely, but that might be bad for his health; and if people would fall in love with him, just by meeting him at parties, he didn't see how he could be to blame; they must take their own risks. Lately, he had been studying too hard, was out of health, and out of pocket, and glad to accept the offer from his uncle Judkins of a country school for the winter. But then, when he came he did not know what soft-hearted girls there were at Quinnebasset.

Now, this was the sort of young man who had come to Mr. Willard's and taken possession of the guest-chamber, with the black-walnut furniture and new soap-stone stove. He was very good-natured, had no objection to fried pork, and helped Tid and Mate with their algebra in the evening. At first, he was rather shy of Judith, out of regard to her peace of mind; but when he heard of her engagement, he thought it safe to ask her to join his class in astronomy. He was quite at home in the stars, and enjoyed marshalling his pupils into the highway, and pointing out the constellations with his bamboo cane. When Judith proposed Marian as one of the class, Mr. Bailey doubted whether

it was just the thing, for he saw she blushed easily, and must, therefore, be very susceptible. But he could not say this to Judith,—modesty forbade,—and as there seemed to be no other good and sufficient objection, he had to let her come. Woful mistake! For after that half a dozen other girls of her age claimed the same privilege. They did not attend the district school; they were too old for that; and, but for this astronomy class, poor Mr. Bailey could have kept clear of them, and not damaged their budding affections. But here he was, an irresistible young man, just out of college, surrounded by a bevy of admiring young ladies, who hung on his words, and were evidently half in love at the very first lesson. It was a trying position, especially for a young man with such unflinching ideas of duty. The girls simply thought him pompous and disagreeable, and laughed among themselves at Marian's off-hand description.

"Mr. Bailey belongs to the aristocracy—he makes you feel as if you made soap for a living!"

Still, they had no idea how enormously conceited he really was. He proved to be a good teacher, and was persuaded to take a private school in the spring, which everybody attended, academy girls and all.

Marian had always been in the habit of running into Mr. Willard's at any hour of the day, and went still oftener after Mr. Bailey came, on account of the astronomy lessons. In the girlish simplicity which always belongs to seventeen, or always ought to, she never thought of such a thing as his taking her calls to himself, especially as she really disliked him, in spite of her efforts to the contrary.

"But, then," as she said to Judith, "I mean to treat him politely, if it half kills me, and perhaps I shall feel better towards him. You know we tried being kind to poor O'Neil, and now she doesn't seem half so disagreeable to us as she did."

Judith said, for her part, she didn't see but Mr. Bailey was nice enough; why not?

"That's just as anybody thinks," returned Marian; "but here he comes. I hope I can slip off without his seeing me."

But Mr. Bailey made such rapid progress with his little cane, that the girls had not turned the corner before he met them face to face. Marian greeted him with a faint smile, followed by a blush of shame just for thinking how hard the smile came. The smile might not have frightened the youth so much, but the blush was perfectly appalling. What did that girl mean by blushing every time she saw him? What did she mean by putting herself so much in his way, and at the same time seeming so shy of him, never speaking unless he spoke to her, and then only in monosyllables? He had reason to think the girls in this country village were all very susceptible; but hadn't he seen from the first that Marian was the most so of all?

"The feeling is deeper in her case, for she sees more of me than the others do. I wonder if the doctor notices it. Fathers are rather blind in such matters. But if he has noticed it, I hope he doesn't blame *me*," thought the conscientious young man, as he marched up Mr. Willard's staircase, with a groan. "I don't see why I was made so fascinating," said he, addressing the

looking-glass, which cast back the cruel reflection of a perfect Adonis with fists clinched.

To calm his excited feelings Mr. Bailey took a stroll in the graveyard. If I did not know him myself, personally, I should never dare record what follows, for it almost surpasses belief. But, girls, such a man as this does exist, and I have seen him. Marian may give the story in her own words.

Miss Tottenham.

March 15. I don't believe I can tell it. My face is on fire, my soul, too! I have sat here, shaking with laughter, and at the same time so ashamed that I don't dare look in the glass.

That Mr. Bailey! That little red-headed goose! To think he should have thought— Why, I was walking in the graveyard, just to see if I could find some moss, up in one corner,— there's always some there when the snow leaves a bare spot,— and in he came, as if he was owner of the grounds, and began to "beau me" round among the tombs. I stood it as well as I could. He talked about death and eternity, and seemed to be trying to solemnize my mind; but, if you'll believe it, I got to laughing! I suppose it was seeing that cane dance back and forth, pointing out the inscriptions on the gravestones, as if he were teaching me my letters.

I hoped he wouldn't notice, for my head was turned away, and I wasn't shaking much; but he stopped in the middle of "Thanatopsis," and said he,—

"Miss Marian, you would not laugh if you were in a

sane state of mind. Poor child! And to think I should be the cause of it!"

I thought his feelings were wounded, of course, though I had never supposed he was sensitive before.

"Forgive me, sir; I didn't mean to," said I, steady-ing myself against a gravestone, and feeling dreadfully ashamed.

"Poor, *poor* child! it is I who should apologize," said he, patting the crown of my hat. "Your nerves are quite unstrung. Your sweet, girlish nature —"

I wish I could remember the precise words; but it was something about "your sweet, girlish nature, poor, *poor* child! and your young susceptibilities awakened too soon, to be rudely crushed and torn."

I had no idea what he meant; but it sounded so queer that I giggled right out.

"I must go home," said I; "my father will be wanting his supper."

"Stay," said Mr. Bailey, swinging his cane. "Now that I have begun to speak upon this interesting and delicate subject, I think I ought to finish. I may never have the courage again. Don't let it pain you, dear child, that I—I—can read, and, as I may say, intuitively understand your feelings."

"Sir?" said I.

"*Don't* blush so, Miss Marian. Our feelings are involuntary—we are not to blame for them. Love comes to every one sooner or later.

'A mighty pain to love it is,
And 'tis a pain that pain to miss,' &c., &c."

"I don't know, at all, what you mean," said I, run-

ning away from him ; for I was afraid he was going to propose on the spot, though it seemed a preachy way to begin. But he followed and cornered me against a gravestone.

"Miss Marian," said he, as solemn as a death's head, "did you ever fancy you had waked a responsive chord in my heart ?"

"No, sir," said I; "I never thought of such a thing. But I must go home now, and get my father's supper."

He took my hand ; but I snatched it away. If he was trying to make love to me, I thought I had had about enough of it; but I was in such a fit of laughter that I couldn't stop myself to save my life.

"Don't be offended, dear nervous child. I have seen, I could not help seeing, the workings of your susceptible young heart; but the knowledge has never for one instant lowered you in my esteem. Scamp should I be if it had !"

"Sir?" said I. I thought he meant — well, I don't know what I thought; but not the real thing. No, I never dreamed of that.

"I am the one to blame," said he; "but really, I have tried not to attract you. I am not such a villain as to wish to gain the fresh affections of a little girl like you, just to throw them away. If I am fascinating to your sex, it is really because I can't help it, dear! You are a charming, unsophisticated child, and I am interested in you; but I cannot, cannot return your feelings. Besides that, I am not in a situation to marry. And the sooner you know it, my *dear* girl, the better."

Why, Miss Tottenham, the man thought I was in

love with him! That was what he meant! I was so taken by surprise that I believe I screamed. Really, I don't know what I did; only it seems to me I ran right round one of the graves, and then whirled about and "made a cheese." The idea of it! In love with Fordyce Bailey, when I can't bear even the squeak of his boots!

"Mr. Bailey," said I, "let me go by you, sir; I want to go home."

"Poor, poor child!" said he, holding me by the wrists. I know he thought I was a little crazy.

"Let me go!" cried I; "my—father—wants—his—supper!"

"But try to calm yourself, first, my *dear* girl! Was I too harsh with you—too abrupt? Will you forgive me? I meant it for your good."

I could have pulled out every spear of his hair.

"Forgive you?" said I. "I forgive you for being the greatest fool that ever lived in this world. But my father won't forgive you, sir. When he knows what you've been saying to me, sir, he'll—I don't know what he'll do. *Will* you let me go?"

But by that time I was crying so hard I wasn't fit to be seen in the streets. Mr. Bailey was frightened, and asked if he shouldn't go for some peppermint.

"Yes, go," said I; "'twill be better than peppermint to get you out of my sight."

That was just the way I talked; but I'll leave it to Judith if I haven't always been as respectful to him before as if he was the president. Now, I was so exasperated I didn't care what I said.

It was the longest while before the man would be-

lieve I was telling the truth, and wasn't in love with him. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Say, did you ever? It all came of my going to Judith's so much, and his being *such* a fool!

"I never was in love with any one in my life," said I. "My father would think it very improper for a girl of my age. And certainly I don't care any more about *you* than I do about a toad."

I believe I *was* crazy, or I shouldn't have said that. I thought he looked mortified then, though I doubt if it's a possible thing. He told me he felt relieved of a great burden, and I told him I was sorry he had troubled himself so much.

He wanted me to promise I wouldn't mention what he had said; but I wouldn't promise not to tell my father, though I hadn't any idea I really should tell him.

It seemed as if I should die of shame all the way home, going by people's windows; but I kept saying over to myself, "Who ever heard of anybody's dying in one day?"

"Why," said my father, coming along to the door with open arms, "what ails my yellow-haired little girl?"

And I forgot how hungry he must be, and put my head on his shoulder, and told him the whole thing. I never saw him so angry before. He said it was "unparalleled impudence," and Mr. Bailey was a "scatter-wit," and a "swell-head."

"O, father," said I, "it makes me feel as mean as that poem Judith and I wrote about Pauline. I wouldn't have Pauline know this for anything. She would say,



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as she did then, that I have ‘no delicacy and no discretion.’ She’d think I must have done something very improper. Have I, papa? Ought I to have staid away from Judith’s, just because he was there?”

“No,” said he, setting his teeth together; “the outrageous ninny!”

“And, papa, you don’t think any worse of me now than you did before? I’m so afraid of not being respectable, you know.”

“Any worse of you, darling? No: you’re just what a child should be, artless and unconscious; and that jackanapes of a Bailey ought to pay dearly for putting such ideas in your head.”

“Papa, you keep calling him names — do you know it?”

“Yes, yes, so I do; and it’s very undignified. But the idea of my little girl’s being so insulted brings out the old Adam! I’m glad you’ve told me, though. You’ve no mother to talk with, and I hope, little Marian, you’ll always come to papa. Young creatures, like you, mustn’t try to bear their little troubles alone.”

“You don’t call this a little trouble, papa? O, you can’t mean so!”

Then my father laughed.

“See here, Marian; you and I are both foolish to take it so seriously. It is really a capital joke. I’ve heard of a man’s asking a woman to love him,—that’s a common thing,—but never in my life before of a man’s asking a woman *not* to love him! This Bailey is an original genius; he has made you what I should call an anti-offer.”

“O, papa, I wouldn’t have Judith know it for the world!”

"What, your intimate friend? I should think you would wish to put her on her guard,—she may have to go through the same ordeal herself."

"Why, father, you forget she's engaged! I don't want her to know; for I—I'm afraid she'll look down on me, as very inferior. She's only eight months older than I, and engaged to be married; and here am I, papa—I've not only never had an offer, but I've just had what's a great deal *worse than none!*"

"Marian, I'd like to box your ears."

"I know it sounds silly, papa, and I'm talking rattlety-bang; but there's honest truth in it, too. You wouldn't believe it sets Judith up with all the girls to be engaged younger than the rest,—but it does. O, you can't understand girls' foolishness, father!"

"I'll try to, dear, for your sake," said he, in a very different tone, and kissing me tenderly. "Poor motherless child!" His voice always trembles when he says that, and now it broke down completely. "Tell me, do young ladies count their lovers, and boast of them, as Indians do of scalps?"

"Why, father, what an idea!"

"I happened to think of it, because I overheard a frizzly-headed girl, the other day, saying to another girl, 'How many offers have you had? I've had nine!' Perhaps she carries them round, signed and sealed, strung on a chain, dangling from her neck; what do you suppose?"

"Father, where did that girl live?"

"At Poonoosac."

"Well, I don't believe there's a girl at Quinnebasset that would have talked so, unless it's Naomi Giddings.

Still they would all feel dreadfully if they never, never should have offers, you know, and should live to be as much as thirty years old!"

"Ah! But, Marian, one of the most charming women I ever knew lived to the great age of forty, and boasted that she had never had a lover. She might have had dozens, but didn't see any one she fancied, and was so high-minded and delicate, that she always took care to prevent her gentleman friends from coming to the point; and they understood her, and blessed her for it in their hearts."

"She couldn't have stopped them if they'd been like Mr. Bailey."

"I suppose not, dear. Well, as I was saying, perhaps times have changed; but in my day, this aforesaid lady was greatly respected. And for my part I think better of her this minute than I do of the little witch who carries nine offers dangling from her watch-chain. If that girl ever marries, it will be a crooked stick. All this flirting comes of empty brains, Marian, empty brains. If I ever catch you at it, I shall set you to washing the barn floor."

"You needn't be alarmed, papa; I don't know how to flirt. But I do know how to make cream toast, and I'll have some ready before you starve."

Then I ran off, ever so light-hearted, and opened a can of peaches to celebrate my anti-offer. My father thinks I'm just as respectable as ever, and I hope you do, too, Miss Tottenham; but I haven't got used to it yet, and don't know what I think myself.

CHAPTER XXX.

AUNT HINSDALE PUZZLED.

Miss Tottenham.

MARCH 18.



LONG letter from Keller. He says it's "regularly jolly" up there. After the last storm the snow was so deep in some places that the horses couldn't walk, and had to be lashed on to the sleds like sacks of meal, and the men hauled them through with their snow-shoes on. "Turn about is fair play," says Keller.

Don't I wish I was a boy, and could go "gumming" with him and Silas? Only it doesn't seem proper to do it Sundays. If a tree is too high to climb, they cut it down without mercy; or sometimes they use long poles with pieces of iron stuck in the end, to scrape off the gum, while they stand under the trees and catch it as it falls.

Silas has been swamping, that is, cutting a road through the woods for the men. He is as strong as Samson; but I know Judith would like it better if he would study law. She says people in Boston look down on farmers. I suppose "people in Boston" means Fordyce Bailey. Now I'd as lief Keller would be a farmer as anything else, if he'd only stay so. But

you might as well think of a mocking-bird's keeping to one tune. He says Lowell is right: "No man is born into the world but his work is born with him," and he thinks (just this minute) it's *his* business to be a lumberman; only he almost wishes he were chopping or scaling, instead of tending sled! The work is hard, for he has to help oxen pull the logs on to the sled side-wise, for other oxen to haul, and sometimes the logs strike out and hit him; and once he got such a punch in the side that he "came within three fourths of an inch of fainting." But this he wrote on a private slip, marked "confidential," and added,—

"Tell Jude she ought to write Si. He doesn't say anything, but he's got the blues, I know. She ought to write every week; length no objection. By the way, I mistrust Si doesn't like Bailey's boarding there. Bailey's a donkey. I've set off the Quinnebasset girls to him, told him they were easy to fall in love; and he took in the bait like a hornpout, and is half scared out of his wits. Don't let the girls know; this was a great joke, but they might not see it. I wouldn't have Marie get hold of it; she thinks I'm awful, any way."

There, Miss Tottenham, now you perceive the origin of that scene in the graveyard. I wish my father could know.

But the postscript of that confidential slip was so precious, it left a warm feeling at my heart for hours.

"Good by, blessed old Molly. I'm a bad lot; but when I forget what you did for me a year ago last winter, my memory will be rather shrivelled up. It isn't every girl would borrow money out of her wedding gown to help a reprobate like me. You're a reg

ular little pickle, and that's a fact. I've got a plan in my head to talk over with Bob, that will bring you back every penny. Glad father didn't hear of that scrape. You're as deep as Jacob's well, and I'm not afraid of your telling. Queer, when you used to be such a case for letting things slip off the end of your tongue."

You see by this, Miss Tottenham, that I gave Keller some of my own money to get him out of James Works's clutches. Since Keller himself mentioned it to Pauline, I don't mind if you know it. He would have gone to sea if it hadn't been for me, and I've always felt so thankful for dear mother's sake, that I had the power to keep him at home. What if I did "take it out of my wedding gown"! I don't see what girls with left-handed offers want of wedding gowns! Of course Keller can't return the money, and I never expected he would.

I haven't seen Mr. Bailey yet. Judith thought it strange I didn't go last night to recite my astronomy lesson. Guess she'd have thought it stranger yet if she'd known why I didn't! My father's going with me next Thursday evening, and then going after me. By that means I shall manage to appear respectable; and after a while I shan't feel as I do now about meeting the lady-killing Fordyce. Thank Heaven, I have a father to take care of me. He is getting to be father and mother too.

March 20. I've done something dreadful. My self-esteem is all gone. I feel a wrinkle coming in my forehead. Last night we had what I call a severe attack of company, and I was worried out of my senses; that

was the beginning of it. Uncle and aunt Hinsdale, and three cousins and cousinesses, to tea, and the blanc-mange ran like porridge, and the cake had collapsed in the middle. Then, after tea, Mrs. Page to consult my father about some new developments in her liver. She had just sighed herself out of the house, and I was having a chat in the corner with uncle Charles, when aunt Marian came along and sat down beside us. I enjoy uncle Charles when I can get him alone; and many is the good talk we've had about mother. I can say things to him I can't say to my father for fear of calling up that look of undying sorrow. Uncle Charles is my uncle-confessor, and listens to all my wicked feelings, and leaves me soothed and happy. He is full of the love of Christ, and just the best preacher and dearest man; but auntie never ought to have been his wife. Aunt Filura says so too. How does that woman contrive to make you feel so uncomfortable? She looks as if she considered you to blame about something, and you get to wondering what it is, or I do, till I forget the very thing I was going to say.

She set the heel of her stocking, and then asked me if I made any oilnut pickles last summer. As if I could remember to watch the trees all the time! The next question was, "What luck with the soft soap?"

I never should have thought of making it if it hadn't been for her. Mamma never made any; but, to please aunt Hinsdale, I had Mrs. Nason set up what you call a leach-barrel week before last.

"Auntie," said I, "the soap wouldn't come, and Mrs. Nason set it out in the shed, where the sun shines part of the day, hoping the ley would eat the grease; but

the ley hadn't force enough, and a dog came along and ate the grease. I told Mrs. Nason I was glad; the grease was eaten, and wasn't that all she wanted?"

Aunt Hinsdale didn't see any joke in such a waste of property; she never does see jokes; and uncle Charles has to laugh for both of them. He shook his sides over my soap, and I was just getting so I could meet auntie's eyes without flinching, when suddenly she went along to the centre-table, to my writing-desk, and said she,—

"This is the place where you keep your little fortune—is it, Marian?"

She did not mean any harm; but since I have spent two hundred dollars of that money, I don't like to hear about my "little fortune." My face flamed, and of course everybody stopped talking and looked straight at me. And upon that, auntie added, as an after-thought,—

"Please let me look at the secret drawer. Where do you touch the spring?"

I knew then it was all over with me. It wasn't two seconds before she had those government bonds in her lap, and was counting them.

"One, two, three. Why, where are the others?"

It was of no use to pretend not to hear, for auntie never lets anybody off.

"I had a use for them," said I in a low voice, with the room so still you could have heard a pin drop.

My father looked amazed, but said nothing. I knew he would wait till everybody was gone before asking questions; and aunt Hinsdale was too well bred to pursue the subject, though her eyes never stopped

following me with an inquiring gaze, as much as to say,—

“Child, child, what have you done with that money?”

She gave it to me out and out, for my unfortunate name, and I had a perfect right to spend it as I chose; still it’s very natural she should feel an interest. A girl of seventeen isn’t supposed to have any sense, and perhaps she thinks I used the bonds for curl-papers.

“Marian,” said she, in the entry,— and Sarah heard her, too,—“with all your faults I always gave you credit for being open-hearted. I do hope you are not growing up secretive; that’s so disagreeable.”

I’d like to know who is more secretive than her Sarah!

I dreaded to have the front door close, for my father went right to poking the fire, and I knew something was coming.

“Well, Marian, what does this mean?”

“O, papa, please don’t ask me. It was long, long ago I spent that money. I couldn’t go to you for advice. ’Twas right, and I’ve never been sorry, papa; but, any way, I had to do it; and please don’t ask me.”

My father looked me right in the eye, and said he,—

“For shame on Keller!”

“Why, how did you know that?”

I said it before I thought. I took it for granted he knew the whole thing. It was too late then to take it back. I never said another word, but I had the same as told him the money had gone to pay Keller’s debts.

O, Miss Tottenham, that boy trusts me so entirely, and now I have betrayed him!

March 21. Horrible! Horrible! Keller has met with a serious accident! As he was loading a sled, one of the logs hit him a blow which threw him over and broke his leg. The pain was so great, that he did not have his senses for some time. They laid him on a sled, and took him down to Monson, to a doctor, to have the bones set; but he is in a bad condition. It is worse than a common broken leg; it is a compound fracture. Silas Hackett wrote the letter, and sent a man with it who could come faster than the stage. Of course my father will go up to Monson at once; and what do you think? Keller sends for me to go too! Not Pauline, but me. Silas says he won't go to sleep till I get there. Poor old darling! I wish I could take him in my arms and rock him! Pauline wondered if there wasn't some mistake in the letter, and I know her husband thinks Keller is out of his senses, or he couldn't have asked for me instead of Pauline. But Silas says his head is "level," thank you, sir; and I'm going. The travelling is the very worst; but what of that?

My father will come back and leave me up there with Keller. He, and Benjie, and Tom will go to Pauline's for their meals. How long I shall stay will depend upon how long I'm needed. I shall take you with me in my carpet-bag, Miss Tottenham, for I find you're good for nervousness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UP COUNTRY.

Miss Tottenham.

MARCH 23.

E got here alive, though there was one time when it didn't seem possible. Since the great storm the snow is so hard and deep that my father and Mr. Whiting had to keep getting out and shovelling ahead of us with a snow shovel, and then lifting the runners of the pung over the drifts. Who ever heard the like the last of March ?

I supposed Monson would seem back-woodsy ; but it doesn't ; and the hotel is very respectable. Keller is in a small room up stairs, and Silas Hackett was bathing his poor, hot face. How sick he looks ! He was glad enough to see my father ; but when I went up to him he drew my face down to his, and kissed it, and wet it with tears.

"How queer you looked when you came in !" said he ; "just as if you were looking into somebody's grave, and saying, 'Poor fellow ! I wish I could have seen him before he died.' "

"But you are not dead, little dear, or anywhere near it," said I, though my heart ached clear up to my throat ; for it was plain to be seen, by the way Silas

tucked down the sheet under his chin, that he was a very sick boy; also by the business look on my father's face as he said I might leave the room, he was going to examine the wound.

"Let her stay," whispered Keller. "If there's going to be anything more done to me, I want her here. Say, Molly: you came on purpose to stay by me—didn't you?"

I believe the other physician was not at fault; but there was something wrong about the setting of the bones, and it had to be all done over again. I thought I could not stay and see that sight. Things began to whirl round and grow dark; but there was the dear boy appealing to me with such a look in his eyes! and how could I refuse?

"If I have to go through it again, I want women folks this time. I knew Pauline would run; but you're not tender-hearted like her; I thought you wouldn't be afraid."

I caught hold of the bed-post, and said I, "Afraid of what? I'll stay and see you cut up into inch pieces, Keller Prescott, if you want me to."

That seemed to gratify him very much; so I made a few more cold-blooded remarks, and then went off and sat on the top stair, waiting for things to stop whirling. After a while Silas came to me, and said he,—

"You'll do no such thing. He'll be under the influence of ether, and won't know whether you're there or not."

Then my father came, and advised me to go to my room and rest. But I told him I had given Keller my word, and I must stay and hold the sponge to his mouth;

I certainly wouldn't faint away. My father shook his head, but afterwards gave a half consent. I knew all the time he would be ashamed of me if I drew back.

It is all over now, and I am trying to drive it out of my mind. I am so glad I staid! It was a little atonement for betraying the poor boy's confidence, and telling about the debt to Thankful Works. I can't confess to him yet; but every time he presses my hand for gratitude, a pang goes through my conscience.

March 26. Keller is said to be doing well, and my father and Silas have both gone; they could neither of them stay longer. It was not safe to leave me alone with such a sick boy, and a Mrs. Vennebal, from Greenfield, was engaged as a regular nurse. But just as my father was starting away, a woman came up stairs, puffing like a boiling hasty pudding. It was Thankful Works, the good soul. The pung she came in had broken down, and she had walked a mile through the drifts. Her husband, who is at work in the woods, sent word to her that Keller was badly hurt, and not expected to live, and she had left her house in care of "his" oldest daughter, and hired a man to bring her all this distance. Keller was glad to see her. Her crying seems to amuse him, and he says the time is shorter the more people you divide it among. But for my part I had hard work to keep up my spirits before, and don't know what I shall do now. James Works won't like this when he hears of it. Mrs. Vennebal wouldn't go, or at any rate didn't; and here is Keller with two nurses to make him a double allowance of gruel. I don't see but I may as well go visiting up to camp. Silas promised to come for me if the roads grew better.

Thankful says, if Keller never should walk again, it wouldn't surprise her. But nothing dreadful ever would surprise her. I won't listen to what she says.

Last evening I called her to the door to see Northern Lights — the most magnificent sight. The whole sky was quivering with rosy lightning, as if the heavens were uttering speech in words of fire.

"Thankful," said I, "*did* you ever see anything so glorious?"

She was just inside the entry, and I could not make her cross the threshold.

"It's anything but a handsome sight to me," she groaned.

"Why, Thankful, what do you mean?"

"I mean something awful is going to happen. The sky don't look that way for nothing."

I told her that reminded me of the Norsemen's fancy, that the Aurora was a sort of shadow-picture of their war-maidens fighting up in heaven.

"More likely it foretells fighting on earth," said she, "or what's worse. The last time I saw it so red was one night when Josiah was alive and drunk. He made me get out of bed and hurrah for McClellan. I knew, the moment I looked out, there was going to be a battle; and, sure enough, we had news of one next day."

"Thankful," said I, changing the subject, "I'm glad your new husband doesn't drink. You must be a happier woman than you used to be."

"Well, yes," said she, hiding behind her spectacles, with that queer look of hers. "All men have their faults; if 'tisn't one thing, it's another. You may de-

pend there was no fun for me in Josiah's day, getting up cold nights to hurrah for McClellan; still, I will say this for him: there never was a kinder man than what Josiah was when he was himself—a good, liberal, open-hearted soul, not one of those kind that's strenuous about the way you lay out every red cent."

She says a great deal lately about Josiah's kindness. I never heard her mention it before.

March 28. Thankful's gloomy fears have been realized, and I hope this is an end of it. James appeared yesterday from Tomhegan, and Mrs. Vennebal says she overheard him telling his wife he "came for the express purpose of blowing of her up. She might stay now till she could get back again; but what did she come for in such going as this? She'd cost a man an independent fortune at this rate."

I told Keller I should suppose a woman with three thousand dollars of her own could do as she liked with it; but he says her money has all gone to buy land, and now she isn't worth the least thing. I think marriage is dreadful.

March 30. Keller was very feverish last night, and Thankful would have sent for my father, but Mrs. Vennebal advised waiting till morning; and now he is better. I could not sleep for fright. I thought Keller was going to die; and every time I prayed he might get well, I kept thinking what aunt Filura said, when we were so anxious about mother—"Don't pray too hard, Mary Ann, for how do you know her getting well would prove for the best? And if God should grant what isn't really for the best, because of your importunity, it would not be a blessing, but a curse. I find," said she,

"it is always wisest to add, 'Thy will be done,' and then I feel safe." I suppose auntie doesn't know those are the four hardest words in the English language.

A blind man came along yesterday, peddling original poetry, and it seemed to interest Keller. Here is a little of it:—

"I was made blind, not by God's will,
But by a turbine water-wheel!
In eighteen hundred fifty-three
I was made blind, *and* cannot see!"

Keller says that is just his case. He was made lame, not by God's will, but by a plaguy old pine tree. Now I'm sure this is not the way to talk, and I have tried hard to convince him that all the events we call accidents are links in a great chain; and God never lets go the chain, any more than he lets a planet fly off into space. Uncle Hinsdale says it's a pity for us to mourn over mistakes, just as if our heavenly Father didn't know they must certainly happen, and hadn't left a margin for them in his plan of the world. I talk as pious, dear me! you'd think I'd been through the siege of St. Bartholomew. I shouldn't be patient if I were in Keller's place; but I know how *he* ought to feel; O, certainly!

"Keller," said I, "don't you remember how you and I used to sit Sunday evenings, with mother between us, on the big sofa, and hear her say that every single thing that comes to us, whether joy or sorrow, is sent in love, and if we accept it like little children, it is sure to do us good?"

"H'm! I could bear that kind of talk from an angel like mother; but your cheeks are a little too red,

Molly, and you're a little too steady on your pins to preach to a fellow that's down. Wait till you're lame for life yourself, and then see what you'll say."

"Nonsense about being lame for life," said I. "I don't believe a word of it. It's one of Thankful's whimsies, and she's a woman that's afraid of red Northern Lights."

"But, Molly, if I'm going to get over it, why didn't father say so? There's one dead sure thing—I shall be bobbing round on crutches all summer. Won't it be nuts for Marie Smith? She always made fun of me on the sly."

Then he began to throw pillows and towels about at such a rate that I had to comb his hair to compose him. I don't know why he should talk so of dear Marie Smith. If he had said it of any of the other girls I should not have wondered so much; though there is not one that wouldn't like him all the better for being in trouble, and so I assured him. Little he knows how dear he has grown to me. I shan't say any more to him about resignation, though, for I find it always sets him to throwing pillows.

April 5. Silas came for me to go up to camp, and I supposed Keller was willing to spare me; but he drew his face down in a minute, and began to look out of the window.

"It is a very backward spring," said he. "I did hope I should live to see the dandelions; but it doesn't seem much like it now."

I ran out of the room, for I couldn't bear that, and came back with some jelly, just as if I had gone for it on purpose.

"Keller," said I, "I'm not going up to camp."

"O, you'd better. You may never have so good a chance again."

"I'll never have so good a chance to break my neck. The travelling is just awful; now, Silas, don't you pretend it isn't. I'll make you both tell me all about camp-life, and that will do just as well, and better."

Silas said to me, privately, that he knew Keller had "hypo;" I ought to go, and not mind him. Yes, I presume he has hypo; but that's no reason why I should leave him with Thankful, to hear that mournful "North Wind." It took an uncommonly nice supper last night, and a game of backgammon, to drive that chant out of his head.

When Silas found I wouldn't go, he staid two hours for company, and we talked the poor boy into spirits again. He gave up the idea of dying, and thought he should like some beans, such as they cook at camp in "bean-holes."

"As if they are any better than what you get at home!" said I.

That made him snap his fingers, and tell a long story about the cook in a checked apron with a bib to it.

"Clean as a whistle. Goes at it as if he knew how. None of your little messes. He mixes biscuits in a pan as big as a tub, bakes 'em before the fire, and they come out regular whoppers. Tell you what, Molly: you ought to see us on the deacon's seat, watching 'em bake."

"What is the deacon's seat?"

"The three-cornered bench that runs round the fire, where the men sit to warm their feet. Back of it are

the bunks, made of cedar boughs, and covered with quilts, where you sleep with your feet towards the fire. Molly, your education never'll be finished till you camp out. Now, you ought to see that thorough-shot boom the men are making."

Didn't I want to? "What is it?" said I.

"It's a sort of Virginia fence, like. They build it on the ice to enclose the logs, and then, when the ice melts, there it is, and the logs are held safe. I suppose you think the ice goes out of the lake with a crash, as it does out of our rivers; but no—it melts, like sugar. You look at it some morning, and think it is just as it has been all winter; but it is only the ghost of itself, and before night it has vamosed entirely."

"Yes; and then the logs go to the outlet," said I. "and, as they move down river, men in red shirts come and pick them out with cant-dogs. But how are people so sure whose logs they are?"

"What a question, Molly! Every lumberman in every town along the banks has a particular mark on his logs, such as a cross or a pair of bellows; so of course there can't be mistakes."

"Well, I'm glad you're not a river-driver, Keller; it would frighten me to death."

"Pshaw! women haven't any pluck," said he. And then Silas and I made a dash upon him, and said he needn't talk about women; he was an invalid of the first water, and as spleeny as Mrs. Page. We had a gay time, and got him out of his megrims; but Thankful came in and said the blood was all in his head, and sent us out of the room.

Silas didn't like to go back to camp without me, and

I said I wished Judith were here to go in my place, never thinking but he would say, "So do I, too." But he made no answer; just went to counting the rings in the end of a maple stick, as if his life depended on finding out the age of the tree. In all the times I have seen him here, he has not once mentioned her name; and Keller says he never speaks of her to him. Keller says Si and Robert are "the deep kind," and never talk of what is next their hearts. Silas, he knows, is very much attached to Judith, and has been for years; "thinks a great deal more of her than she deserves."

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNJUST SUSPICIONS.

Miss Tottenham.

MAY 1.

OME again. Robert came after us. It was pretty hard for Keller, but he bore it better than we feared. We came in a pung, and he lay on the straw, like Margery Daw. Some of the way there was snow, but in most places the ground was bare, and the runners grated so it set your teeth on edge. Keller didn't say much, but lay, with my brown veil over his face, looking up at the sky; and when Robert went into a house along the road to get him a cup of tea, he burst forth all at once.

“Molly, I tell you this is a great lesson. When a fellow's down, and can't help himself, he has a good chance to think; and I've thought more within a month than I ever did before in my life. Anything new to offer about resignation and so forth? If so, preach away, for I'm going to try it, and see how it works.”

“O, Keller,” said I, “I'm ashamed that I ever preached to you. You're twice as patient as I am, and have behaved like a lamb all the time, with the exception of firing pillows.”

And then I stooped over and kissed him, for he likes to be petted since he is sick.

"Patient, Molly? Me patient? Well, I like that! But, you see, I shouldn't have gained anything by kicking against the pricks. Can't do it very well with a lame leg. When a fellow's laid on the shelf for life — "

"Don't, Keller. You're not laid on the shelf for life. That's all a mistake."

"How do you know?"

"Robert says so."

"Does he? Good for Bob! Well, wait and see what father thinks. I shall know the whole story the moment I catch his eye. But, Molly, if I do get well, I'm going to turn over a new leaf. You needn't tell anybody I said so, though."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Go to college."

"O, Keller! joyful! Only I should think 'twas Epsom salts by the face you make."

"Well, Molly, I can swallow it for father's sake."

"I wouldn't, Keller; it isn't really necessary for a young man to go to college. Now, there's Robert."

"Yes, I know. You're always quoting Bob. But, Marian, I shouldn't study by myself, as he does. He's a natural digger. I have to be put up to it, and that's why I ought to go to college."

"But, Keller, you've always said you wanted to be a business man."

"Well, is that any reason I shouldn't know anything? Listen a minute, Marian. If I should go into business now, I should fly right off the handle, for I haven't any stick-to-it-iveness at all."

I was very much surprised, for I never heard Keller admit that before.

"Yes, I need discipline, Molly; that's a fact; and study is what's going to give it to me. Father's in the right of it. I see it now."

"But you're not fitted for college."

"Yes, I am, or very near it. All I need is a little rub at mathematics, and father can put me through this summer if he's a mind to. Hillo! here comes Bob with the tea. Wish I could pick that fellow's brains, and steal some of the knowledge. He never'd miss it."

It is certain that Keller has been thinking hard during this sickness. What if it should be the turning-point in his life?

It was so delightful to get home; only I suppose there is one face I shall always miss—always, always! I have longed for a good hugging from Benjie, and a cosy chat with my father. The house was fairly illuminated; Pauline and Judith were here waiting for us; aunt Filura came, too, with her "face like a benediction," and her cap-strings flying, and Miss O'Neil, fresh from kissing the blarney stone. Half the town dropped in in the course of the evening, Marie Smith among the rest; but she couldn't keep the tears back. That doesn't look like making fun, and I hope Keller is satisfied. Poor little Benjie kept looking at him, stretched on the sofa, and whispered to me, "It's too wicked-bad!" But, good news! My father says there is no need of permanent lameness, if Keller takes proper care of himself. The boy's face is beaming with smiles.

Everybody seemed as glad to see us as if we had been gone a year—all but Mr. Bailey, who hadn't much to say. He isn't very well, and Keller thinks he looks "winter-killed." I never see him pass the window but I think of Robert's speech,—

"There he goes in his rolling tower."

I don't believe any ancient warrior ever did wheel off to battle in one of those movable towers with more sense of importance than Mr. Bailey feels walking our streets. His school won't last forever, which is a comfort, and it is so late now that I shan't go any more.

Silas starts for Boston to-morrow to learn civil engineering!! It is a sudden plan, and that is why I use two exclamation points. Wonder if it has anything to do with wanting to please Judith? She declares she never said a word against his being a farmer; still, he must know she has no taste for cows and sheep. His mother doesn't like his going away. She says he'll be glad to come home and "farm it" again. You see she talks "dialect," and is a little underbred, which is a mortification to Judith.

Robert said to me the other day, "What do you think of the lovers? Seem pretty cool—don't they?"

I told him I supposed they were very deep.

"Ocean deep," said he. "I can't make them out. Only this I know: Silas is very much attached to Judith, and I begin to think it is almost a pity she is so well aware of it."

"Why, what do you mean?" said I.

"I mean that girls are coquettes naturally, and it doesn't answer to let them know their power if you can help it. It makes little tyrants of them, Marian."

"But what if she thinks as much of Silas as he does of her?"

"Well, I hope she does; but she has a very queer way of showing it. If I was engaged to a young lady, I should think it polite, at least, for her to stay in the room when I called."

"O, Robert," said I, "your eyes are altogether too sharp. Judith had to keep going out yesterday, for she was having a dress fitted."

Robert is very keen, and sees deep down into most things; but in such affairs as this his judgment seems to fail him. I suppose it is because he never was in love. But neither was I ever in love; still, being a woman, I have a sort of insight, and can see that Judith's state of mind is all right; and I assured him over and over that he needn't trouble himself.

He leaves with Silas to-morrow, to walk a hospital just for two or three weeks. I should think it would be a "path of pain."

May 5. Mr. Bailey and Judith spend a great deal of time tracing constellations. They stand in the front door, or put their heads out at the window, and gaze up, and talk up, up, out of my reach. They ask me to go and join them; but I'm afraid Mr. Bailey may take another fright. Moreover, I don't care to go. I'm sick of the sky for a long while to come, it is so mixed in my mind with that little bamboo cane. I told Judith yesterday I should be glad when this school was done, so she and I could see more of each other, and make it seem like old times. And I find she feels just so herself, only she is so kind-hearted that she can't help being polite to Mr. Bailey. Her disposition is lovely;

but I don't see the need of her treating him like a particular friend.

May 20. Robert is the most suspicious person I ever saw. He came home unexpectedly last night; and the moment he arrived he seemed to sniff mischief in the air, and kept watching Mr. Bailey, and Judith, and me out of the corner of his eye. He wasn't decently polite to Fordyce, as Judith calls him, and said two or three gruff things; but Fordyce looked as serene as the Great Dipper. I don't believe he would know a sneer was meant for him unless you pointed your finger straight at him.

Judith hasn't been at all well lately. She thinks it is studying too hard; and I dare say she takes cold keeping her head out of the window so much. She has fits of crying and laughing, and can't seem to stop herself; and when Tid brought her a letter the other night from Silas, she trembled as if she had an ague fit. Aunt Esther has no patience with the poor dear. She says,—

“Is Judy sick? or has she got the hysterics?”

She never was sick herself. She is as tough as a pine knot. If she wasn't quite so tough, perhaps she'd be a little more tender. Such unfeeling remarks distress Judith, and she begged me to go and stay with her a day or two, for aunt Esther is always pleasanter when I am in the house, though I don't know why. Aunt Filura happened along, and I could leave as well as not, and I went; and that was the very night Robert came. For two or three days Judith hadn't been down to breakfast; but the next morning she tried it, and looked as if she was going to fall down stairs.

Fordyce ran up to meet her, and steadied her by putting his arm round her waist. A mere act of politeness, of course, though I wouldn't have thanked him for such politeness myself. I'd rather have held on by the balusters. But Robert looked like a thunder-cloud, and hardly spoke a word all through breakfast.

Afterwards, when Judith and Fordyce were going into the parlor, he stopped me in the entry, and asked, in a low tone,—

“How long has this been going on?”

“How long has what been going on?”

“Well, steamboats, for instance,” said he, looking down on me as if I had about as much sense as a nut-cracker. Then it flashed over me what he meant.

“Robert Willard,” said I, “if you’ve no more confidence in your own sister than to suppose she is flirting with Mr. Bailey, you don’t deserve to have a sister; and that’s the living truth.”

His brows cleared a little at that.

“So you’ve seen nothing of the kind,” said he. “Then perhaps I am mistaken. I’m sure I never thought of such a thing till I came home last night, and saw you three sitting in a row, and Fordyce holding Judith’s hand.”

I turned to go into the parlor, and put an end to the conversation; but Robert pinned me to the wall, and made me answer a dozen questions.

“Did I think Judith really cared much for Silas? Why did I think so? Then what made Silas seem so unhappy?”

“I take Judith at her word,” said I, “but it seems

you don't. I'm thankful I haven't a suspicious disposition."

"Well, Marian, perhaps you can set me right. I can't really understand all I've seen since I came home. Why does Fordyce hover about her, and keep his eyes on her every minute of the time?"

"He's always staring at somebody," said I. "He doesn't know any better."

"But why does Judith allow him to hold her hand?"

"O, that is electricity. She is very weak this spring, and my father did order a galvanic battery; but Mr. Bailey has a great deal of magnetic power, so it amounts to the same thing."

Robert made up an awful face.

"There are ontological reasons," said I, quoting from memory, "why the human system is the best known medium of electricity."

"What kind of reasons, Marian? Say that over again — will you?"

"Ontological," I repeated, very solemnly. "If you saw as much of Mr. Bailey as I do, Robert, you wouldn't be so dull of comprehension as you are now. You'd have these big words stored away in your mind."

"No doubt of it. I asked you to say ontological over again, just to see if you would curl your upper lip as high as you did the first time; and 'twas done!" said Robert, going off in one of his spasms of laughing. I was almost afraid Judith would be out to see what the matter was; but he stopped suddenly, and looked very sober.

"What a saint Jude must be to stand so much nonsense! She never takes dislikes to people; it isn't in her."

"No; but you do," said I, "and I know it's wicked of you. But, as true as you live, Robert, I wish Judith was a little wicked, too, for I'm out of all patience with her for liking everybody, and not seeing any difference in people."

"Just so," said Robert; "Jude is too amiable by half; but I never shall be hanged for my sweetness, and I don't believe you will, either, Marian."

That is quite true: I make no boast of amiability. But I think it would have been quite as polite in Robert if he hadn't twitted on facts.

"I was afraid, in the first place, you were going to admire Mr. Bailey rather more than he deserved," said he, "but I don't see any danger of it now. I think you feel a little as I do. Now, I know the creature means well, but my fingers tingle to shake him. Don't these conceited people stir you all up?"

I longed to tell Robert he might shake him for me and welcome. "Twill be many a long day before I forget how Fordyce Bailey handed me back my heart in an old graveyard. Too honest altogether. I never should have missed it! I wonder what Robert would say if he knew of that. I don't believe he could keep his hands off the man — "for ontological reasons."

As for Judith, if she knew of my anti-offer, she would excuse Fordyce, and think he showed himself very kind-hearted.

June 1. Keller is impatient to be studying; but it won't do to let him, and I have locked up all the

books. He is too proud and sensitive to talk with father about his new plans; but he wanted me to sound him about his going to college, and I did. My father looked surprised.

"Too late for that," said he. "He disappointed me once, and now I must disappoint him."

It seems my father has met with losses, though he never mentioned it before; and the money he had laid aside for college expenses is gone. But what did Keller say when I told him? Why, he stood up, leaning on his crutches, looking very pale and handsome, and said he,—

"All the better for that. If father had as much money as John Jacob Astor, I wouldn't take a cent. No, sir! Let me once stand on my own feet, Molly, and I can push myself through. I can teach, and I can saw wood. I've been a drag on the family long enough. Think of that two hundred dollars: will you?"

I put my hand over his mouth till I had told him the whole story about my being so mean—no, so flimsy—as to let father know. And then I went and brought the note he had given me, and tore it up before his eyes.

"You see my telling of it has cancelled the debt, Keller; and now I make you a present of the money."

He laughed, and said we would see about that. But I feel lighter since I have confessed, even though he won't trust me with a secret now as readily as he did before, I'm afraid.

My father had a talk with him which seemed very satisfactory; and I believe Mr. Loring—I can't get

used to calling him William—is going to advance some money. And now the boy is “rubbing up” in mathematics, for it is fully decided that he will enter Harvard in September, crutches or no crutches,—which reminds me that Robert has given him a beautiful pair.

There is no end to everybody’s kindness, or their visits, either. Charlie Snow is here half the time. Keller is running over with fun, and keeps the whole house laughing. Pauline says you may depend he is in earnest this time, and Robert says there’s a light in his eyes he never saw there before. I think a great deal of that from Robert, for I begin to fancy he sees the dark side of people. What a time there would be if Judith should know what he said about her!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PLATONIC LOVE.

 "WHAT'S all this high jinks?" said Keller, as Marian tried to dance the Highland Fling with Benjie's comforter, and ended by playing jollification tunes on the piano as hard as she could pound.

"Mr. Bailey has gone off in his rolling tower, and I'm trying to celebrate. Can't do it before Judith; she doesn't seem to enter into my feelings."

As she spoke, Judith's face appeared in the doorway, looking suspiciously long, and Keller very prudently took to his crutches, muttering, with a scowl,—

"Privacy going on, I'll warrant. Guess I'll leave."

Judith threw herself on the sofa, clasping her hands wearily over her forehead. Marian danced off the music-stool in a moment, and kneeling before her, began to drench her hair with cologne.

"You poor, headachy creature!" said she; "I'm glad you came to me. This seems a little like old times. I've got you to myself once more, and now I mean to keep you."

"O, Marian, you're my dearest in the whole world!" cried Judith, throwing her arms around her friend with a sudden gush of feeling. Embraces were not very

frequent with them; they were not, as they said, "that sort of girls." But this little outburst was rather refreshing to Marian, after the long, dry time of Fordyce, and star-gazing, and bamboo canes. She answered back, laughingly,—

"No, no, Goosie; not your dearest. What would Silas say to that?"

Judith shivered. "Don't speak his name to me."

"Why, Judith!"

"O, if I could only tell somebody how I feel, Marian! You are the very one I'd like to open my heart to. But you couldn't understand, child, you couldn't understand."

"Try me, and see," replied Marian, rather crushed by a sense of "youngness." "Perhaps you don't love Silas as well as you thought you should. There, have I guessed right?"

Judith hid her face in her hands. "Where did you get such an idea as that, Marian?"

"Robert asked me if I didn't think there was a little coolness between you," faltered Marian; "and I suppose that was what put it into my head."

"Robert! did he notice anything? What a boy! O, Marian! how could you two talk of me behind my back? Was it friendly in you? Haven't I always been polite and cordial to Silas? I'm sure, if anybody ever tried —"

Here she brushed Marian off, and sat upright.

"I'm going to tell you the whole story now. It was nothing but kindled love, Marian. It wasn't spontaneous."

"Kindled love?"

"There, dear, I told you you wouldn't understand."

"Yes, I do understand, too. You didn't naturally fancy him. It was his caring for you that made you love him. I knew that before."

"But I didn't love him."

"O, yes, just a little bit, Judith."

"No, child. I liked him. Love is a very, very different thing. '*Nunc scio quid sit amor.*' You remember how we used to read that in the Eclogues, in the dear old days when we went to Mr. Loring. Ah, me! and hadn't any grief beyond leaving the Academy, or any care beyond our Virgil lessons."

"Yes, Jude, '*Nunc scio.*' 'Now I know what love may be.' But that doesn't apply to you. You *don't* know, it seems, and that's just what's the matter."

Judith answered by a flood of tears.

"O, how little you can sympathize with me, Marian! — my best friend, too. There's no one in this world I can talk to, and my heart is just breaking."

Marian looked puzzled and distressed.

"Judith, Judith, my heart will break too, if I'm no more to you than this. I do understand you. I don't wonder you're unhappy. I should feel just as you do if I were in your place. You can't marry Silas, and you'd give your eyes if you hadn't promised."

"Yes, I shall marry him," responded Judith, slowly and firmly. Marian was raising both hands in remonstrance, when Keller's entrance put an end to the conversation; and Judith, declaring her head was better, started for home.

"She'll bear as much waiting upon as any girl I

ever saw," remarked Keller, watching her from the window.

Marian did not hear. She went into the kitchen, put on her checked apron, and got supper, without speaking a word. In the evening she sat thoughtfully over her writing-desk, with paper spread before her; but all she did was to write one letter, asking for a catalogue of Vick's flower-seeds for the garden.

"Vick ought to be pleased with your elegant composition," yawned Keller, tired of the long quiet. "You've been two hours by the clock getting off that letter."

"Papa," said Marian, playing with her paper-folder, "I want to ask you a serious moral question. Isn't an engagement as sacred as a marriage?"

The doctor was so used to being sprung upon suddenly by Marian's "serious moral questions," that he answered, without the least surprise,—

"No, I don't consider it so. Why do you ask?"

"O, I just wanted to know. Suppose I had promised to marry somebody, and afterwards didn't want to do it, what should you say?"

"I should say you ought not to have promised."

"But I'm talking in sober earnest, papa."

"So am I. I mean your promise should have been a conditional one. You are too young to make any other kind."

"But suppose I had made the other kind, firm and hard; what then?"

"Then, my daughter, a bad promise is better broken than kept."

"Everybody doesn't say that, papa."

"I know it; but I do. You asked what *I* said, I believe."

"Well, it isn't very hard work to put this and that together," thought Keller, remembering Judith's long face. "Silas is going to get his walking papers. I suspected as much. What a mercy for Si! Marian means to keep secrets, but she isn't as deep as Jacob's well, not by several inches."

Marian folded her letter and directed an envelope to Mr. Vick with a happier face. Her doubts were at an end, for her father's opinion must certainly be correct; and she resolved to lose no time in repeating it to Judith.

Going to her next day, overflowing with sound advice, she found her on the bed in her own room, reading "The Princess." She kissed Marian, and smiled, but not with effusion. Marian was a little pained.

"There is something lacking in me," thought she; "I don't know exactly what; but I will pump up the right sort of feeling, and sympathize with her, if it's a possible thing."

"Come, dear," said she aloud, "I want you to finish what you were saying yesterday. You think it doesn't interest me; but it does very much indeed. Do pray go on."

"You talked with Robert about me," said Judith, in an injured tone.

"But I won't again."

"Truly? Solemnly? Then I will tell you, Marian. I love somebody, but not Silas."

Marian stared, a little dazed. She thought Judith ought to go into hysterics, and quite expected it of her.

An engaged girl in love with somebody else? But Judith added, with a far-away look, which was not at all sad,—

“Fordyce loves me so dearly that I could no more help loving in return than a bird can help flying.”

Fordyce? Then he was the one, and Robert had guessed right! Marian had not dared ask who it was; but she was scarcely surprised; indeed, it struck her at the moment that she had known it all along. But what did possess Judith? Had she lost her wits? She had certainly sunk down, down into the very depths of foolishness; and Marian could hardly command her voice to speak to her respectfully.

“Fordyce Bailey! Why, Judith!”

“Yes, Marian, I knew just what you would say. You never liked Fordyce, he is so different from common people.”

Marian wished she could say, “O, I like him all the better for being peculiar.” That would have been a great pleasure to Judith; but even for her friendship Marian felt that she could not utter such a lie as that.

“You know I don’t understand metaphysics,” said she, meekly. “I can’t understand such deep people as Mr. Bailey. But that needn’t make any difference, dear; tell me all about it. Whatever touches you touches me.”

For in spite of a little secret disgust, and a great deal of disapproval, Marian could not bear the idea of losing her friend’s confidence, and was determined to keep a discreet tongue if she could.

Then Judith, with many ahs and O dears, began at the very beginning. Silas was good, very good; but it was

tiresome, she said, having him love her so. She couldn't so much as say, "How d'ye do?" but he thought it the sweetest music, or bundle her hair into a net but he called it becoming. Once she happened to remark that she liked guava jelly, and he sent and bought her some, which mortified her extremely, for she wasn't sick at the time, and Pitkin Jones heard of it and laughed. The more she was with Silas, the more she saw they were not congenial. She felt relieved when he went into the woods; but it had been a task to write him every week. She had written short, stupid letters, just to see how he would take it; but he had considered them beautiful. She had dreaded his coming home, no mortal could guess how much.

"Marian," said she, "when somebody loves you so unreasonably that you can't say or do anything to disgust him, then you'll know how disagreeable it is."

"I'm not at all afraid," replied Marian. "I am not fascinating, like you. But, Judith, people in love are never reasonable; what can you expect of poor Silas?"

"Yes, very true; and I am so sorry for him, Marian; much sorrier now since I know what love really is."

Then Judith sighed and looked out of the window, till Marian thought all the story had been told which she was worthy to hear. But presently Judith relented, and began again.

It seems she and Mr. Bailey had fallen in love at first sight; and, such a proceeding being contrary to rules, it had disagreed with them both, and thrown him into dyspepsia and her into headaches. But not a

word had been said till about a week ago, when she fainted, supposing he was drowned; and then there had come a tender and very painful crisis. They loved, but their consciences would not permit them to be happy. Fordyce was the soul of honor, and so was Judith. They could neither of them forget the unfortunate Silas.

"Of course you couldn't!" cried Marian, "pumping up the right sort of feeling" at last, and speaking with animation.

"We were in despair," said Judith, looking as rueful as Thankful when she saw red Northern Lights.

"Of course you were," cried Marian again, who considered despair very proper under the circumstances.

"But we feel very different now," said Judith, with kindling eyes; "for what does this little wee wee world amount to? Fordyce says I must keep my word and marry Silas; and I certainly shall. It seems hard—doesn't it? But I will do my duty, Marian, and then, when it is all over, no one can prevent Fordyce and me from coming together in heaven."

"Why, Judith," said Marian, much shocked, "I never heard any one talk so before."

"Because people are so material and sublunary, dear. Fordyce has elevated my ideas very much. I am willing to drag through this life, doing my duty by Silas, and waiting till by and by to be happy."

"But I shouldn't think Silas would thank you for dragging through life with him. My father wouldn't advise that. He said last night —"

"Don't tell me what your father or any one else says, Marian. I am in an exalted mood, and I don't want

to be disturbed. Fordyce and I have made up our minds, and are contented to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of duty."

Marian beat a tune on the bureau-top. She felt as if the sound advice she had brought from home was out of place now, and must be saved for another time.

"Let me see," said she; "I was at your house the very evening after you fainted away, Judith. You and Mr. Bailey were writing back and forth on the slate; but I didn't suspect it was anything but *crambo* verses. How dull I must be!"

"And all those evenings this spring, when he wrapped you up in his great-coat, and you put your heads out of the window, were you really talking about astronomy?" asked she, a vague distrust of everything coming into her mind. If she should find the stars were spangles cut out of gilt paper, it would hardly surprise her now.

"Yes; sometimes we talked of astronomy," replied Judith; "but oftener we spoke our own thoughts. It is surprising how they harmonize. It is like a chord in music. But I haven't that grasp of sublime ideas which Fordyce has, not by any means. He is a born poet; but you don't appreciate him, Marian."

"No, dear; I told you I didn't."

"And lately we have been scanning the heavens, trying to decide,—now you won't laugh, unless you are very materialistic in your views, Marian,—trying to decide which star to live on after we die."

"What?"

"Venus, Jupiter, or Mars. Fordyce says it stands to reason that disembodied people dwell there. We



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have decided on Venus. We like it best through the telescope.—Marian, you are laughing.”

“I didn’t mean to, Judith; but it sounds *so* queer! Are you sure it isn’t wicked?”

“How can it be wicked? As I was saying, we have decided on Venus, and the one who dies first will go there and wait for the other. This is not a mathematical certainty, Marian; but it is a delightful prospect. And, as spirits are ethereal, why can’t they go where they please? Tell me why not?”

“O, dear! I don’t know; only it seems as if you are talking about things you ought not to,” said Marian, not wishing Judith to see how shocked she really was.

So this was the sort of astronomy lesson the girl had been learning with her arms stuck through the sleeves of Fordyce’s great-coat!

“No wonder she has headache,” thought Marian. “Just hearing her tell of it has wound my head up so it seems as if it would crack.”

“There, Marian, now I have told you things I would never tell to another living being. If Robert should know it, he would consider it weak and ridiculous. He hasn’t a poetical mind, and can’t distinguish the different kinds of love. Now, this is purely platonic, and very spiritualizing. I know by the influence it has had on me. But Robert would not appreciate it. He would fly off in a tangent, and say I was unfair to Silas.”

“Yes, I think he would,” said Marian; “and I must say it has that appearance.”

“Yes; but, Marian, how can I convince you it isn’t

so? Fordyce is going to write me one letter, and that is all. Just think, only one letter, and then our acquaintance will cease! I don't see how I keep up at all! You can't guess what this is to me. Never to see him again! Or only as a friend, perhaps, months or years hence!"

Marian tried to look sympathetic, but failed entirely. Still, she was very sorry for Judith. Poor girl, how she was crying!

"He will never marry; he will labor for the good of mankind, and wait till by and by, as I do, to be happy. But that one precious letter he must write. And, Marian, dearest, I have a favor to ask of you. Will you let him direct the letter to you? It will come some time next week."

"What! a letter to you, directed to me?"

"Yes. Robert knows his writing, and there would be trouble at once."

"So it is to come to me, whether I am willing or not," said Marian. "Then it seems to me, Judith, it is rather late in the day to ask my consent!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GODS AND HALF-GODS.

Miss Tottenham.

AUGUST 5.

 HAVE said nothing to you all summer, for I couldn't. To think Judith should have been so sly! My own little Judith! I thought a marriage engagement was a fixed thing, like the Siamese twins; but it seems it isn't. And when you appear to be studying astronomy, you are really talking about keeping house in the stars. And when you marry one man, you are loving another. And when you get letters from "another," it is in the name of somebody else. My head was in a hard knot.

Last June I promised to watch for that letter from Mr. Bailey, and I made Tom go to the post office every night the moment I heard the stage wheels, so he would be sure to get ahead of Robert, who insists upon bringing our mail, though he must know there's no need of it. I was just as faithful as a watch-dog, and insisted on Keller's spending a few days at Poonoosac, just to get him out of the way. But all in vain. The night the letter actually came, Miss O'Neil was seized with what she considered her last sickness. You may depend upon her for dying at the wrong time. And

she made choice of me, out of all the girls in the village, to go and stay with her. It was the first time she had ever asked me, and I couldn't bear to refuse. I gave Tom a final charge about the post office, and started. It seems Benjie heard me talking to Tom — that child hears everything. When I got to Miss O'Neil's, I found she was having fainting turns, and felt very down-hearted, for she isn't used to being sick ; but she revived at sight of me, and said she "guessed, after all, she should live till green sauce came, and she had always noticed that if she *did* live till green sauce came, she was sure to get through the rest of the year."

About ten o'clock she called for some cold water, and said I must draw it from the Liscomb well, across the street. As I was coming back, pitcher in hand, I met Robert.

"What are you doing ?" said he, taking the pitcher out of my hands.

"Watching with Miss O'Neil."

"I wish I had known it ; I would have brought your mail."

"Was there anything for me ?"

"Yes ; a letter as big as your head."

"Ah ! Where did it come from ?"

I thought I must say something, for he was looking at me, and my face was turning various colors by moonlight.

"From New York."

"New York !"

I was thinking to be sure he would say Boston.

"I beg your pardon for noticing the post-mark,

Marian; but the handwriting was almost exactly like Fordyce Bailey's, and I looked before I thought."

"It's of no consequence," said I, ready to sink through the door-stone. "You needn't apologize. But what did you do with the letter?"

"Well, the fact is, Tom came and took it out of my hands, with the rest of the mail. It seems I wasn't expected to inquire at your box. Benjie read me a small lecture on the subject when I got to the house. I hope you won't be offended with me, and think I meant to be officious. I've always been in the habit of getting your mail, and it never occurred to me till just now that you could have any objections."

You would have thought he was speaking to the Queen of England, he was so deferential. Still I could see that he felt very much hurt.

"O, Robert," said I, "it was only—" and there I stopped. I couldn't say it was only in this particular case that I didn't wish him to get the mail. Perhaps he knew what I meant as well as if I had said it; or perhaps he really thought I considered him officious; at any rate, he was a good deal disturbed, I knew by his eyes. He has the sort that tell when anything goes wrong. It's partly the color that does it—a beautiful brown, like Pauline's, with once in a while a darker shade stealing over it, as if there were unknown depths in there. I never saw such remarkable eyes, with so much cloud and sunshine. It was none of his business about the letter; but I didn't like to see him look so glum, and was going to say something to light up his eyes, when Miss O'Neil called out,—

"Pretty works, Miriam; picking up young men.

and talking in the street. Where's my drink of water?"

I ran in then, for fear the neighbors would hear her.

Next morning, when I went home, I asked Tom what he did with the letters. He said he put them on the centre-table in the sitting-room. My father never alluded to them, only looked at me sharply all dinner-time, and I was afraid to speak. After dinner, when I had brought my work into the sitting-room, he came in and walked back and forth, with his hands behind him, and at last stopped right before me, and said he, in that cutting tone of his,—

"Well, my daughter, you may not know it now, but you will find out some time

"How salt his food who fares
Upon another's bread; how steep his path
Who treadeth up and down another's stairs."

I couldn't think of anybody's stairs I had trodden up and down but Judith's. And then I sprang out of my chair, for I thought he referred to my going to Mr. Willard's so much when Fordyce was there. He must have detected the handwriting as well as Robert, and they both thought it was a secret correspondence. It was quite too bad. I wanted to clear myself; but, just as I was going to speak, I remembered I was under bonds, and couldn't.

"Calm yourself, child," said my father. "I will explain presently why I am displeased with you. But, first of all, I must make confession of having done wrong myself. I took up a letter last night directed to you. It was so thick as to require three postage

stamps, and, as it came from New York, I never doubted it was Vick's Catalogue of Flower Seeds, which you sent for a few days ago. I wondered it should be mailed like a letter, but presumed it was a mistake. And, Marian, I — opened it."

"O, papa!" screamed I.

"It was a careless thing. I claim no right to interfere with your correspondence, as you very well know. I opened this merely to see if Vick had an Ophir Rose."

I just shook all over with the dread of what was coming next.

"And, instead of the catalogue, out fell a written document, beginning, 'Mine in heaven!'"

"O, father! And you thought that meant me!"

"I hardly know what I thought. I was too utterly astonished to form an idea. The next words were like these:—

"'Yes, Judith, though another will call you his for the little while we stay below, yet your own Fordyce bids defiance to the pettiness of this small earth, and dares claim you for his bride *in the stars!*'"

"There, Marian, what do you say to that?"

"What can I say, papa, except that I am very, very sorry?"

"Sorry for what? It seems this is no news to you."

"Sorry you read the letter."

"Ah, but I didn't, my daughter," said he, dropping it in my hands as if it wasn't fit to be touched without gloves. "I never read another line after I came to the 'bride in the stars.'"

"O, but, papa—"

"Yes, Marian, I know what you would say: I had

read far enough to see through the whole business; and so I had. I do not need to ask any questions. Judith is a heartless coquette—a wicked, deceitful girl; and my daughter is conniving with her to impose upon Silas Hackett, one of the best young men that ever grew up in Quinnebasset."

"O, father! stop a minute, and let me think. I don't know how much I ought to tell; but it can't do any harm to say this: I never knew Fordyce was in love with Judith until after he went away."

"Can it be possible, Marian? And you were with them half the time! What is the matter with your eyes?"

"Cataracts, I guess. Robert saw something wrong; but, truly, father, I couldn't believe it was so."

My father came a little nearer to me then, for he began to see I hadn't "connived."

"I am glad to know so much in your favor, Marian. But by what right did Mr. Bailey direct this letter to you? It must have been a contrived plan."

"Yes, sir; but contrived without my knowledge. I didn't even know till the other day that the letter was coming."

"Humph! Judith doesn't scruple to take liberties with her friends. And you are expected to endure all this for her sake?"

"O, it's nothing, papa, except the risk of being misunderstood."

"Yes, child. Do you remember the cat whose paws the monkey made use of to pull chestnuts out of the fire?"

“But there are to be no more letters, father. This is the last one.”

“Indeed!”

“O, yes, sir; Mr. Bailey is very honorable.”

“Very.”

“But, father, he certainly is. He couldn’t help his feelings towards Judith; but he has gone away now, and will stay away; they are not to meet any more.”

“An excellent plan, my dear,—if well carried out. And, meanwhile, Judith is to keep Silas blindfolded, and marry him—is she?”

“She thinks she can’t break her word.”

“Marian, look up in my face. Do you consider this proper behavior?”

“It doesn’t seem so, father; but I don’t understand such matters.”

“Don’t understand! Why, I hope you have common sense.”

“But, father, there is something about love so queer! It seems just like a whirlwind; takes people right off their feet, and spins them round and round.”

My father laughed.

“‘The gods approve
The depth, but not the tumult, of the soul,’ ”

said he. “I don’t believe in *French* love, daughter. You may carry the letter to Judith, with my sincere apologies for opening it; and tell her if I ever see another of the same sort I shall pass it over to Silas Hackett.”

“O, father, how cruel!”

But it was of no use pleading with him; the more I

said, the more exasperated he grew. I went over to Mr. Willard's with the letter, and met Robert on the street. He looked sober, and I knew I looked guilty. It seemed as if I might say something to make things more comfortable, and said I,—

“Robert —”

He stood still, waiting for me to finish; but I only remarked,—

“A lovely day,” and passed on.

Judith was very eager to see me, for she was almost sure I had a letter. She had been at our house in the forenoon to inquire, but found me asleep. Nobody knows how I dreaded to put that document in her hands, with the torn envelope, and tell her who had opened it. I knew she would be dreadfully mortified. But she was worse than that: she was frantic. My father was the last person to have sympathy with her—she said. Never was any one so unlucky as she. And Robert had seen the handwriting. He would take her head off. He couldn't appreciate such a peculiar case. I slipped out and got the hartshorn, and then left her alone to peruse the manuscript. When I came back she was in high feather, and I was glad, though at the same time I knew her face had no right to be so bright.

“It is well this is the end of the correspondence,” said I, “for you see I could not have any more letters pass through my hands.”

I did not tell her my father had said, if she made a cat's paw of me again, he should forbid her the house.

“Fordyce wants to write again,” said she; “but I mustn't allow it. I'm resolved to be faithful to Silas.”

“Faithful!” I had to turn my face away to hide a smile. She kept sniffing the hartshorn, and growing more and more cheerful.

“I’m sorry Robert saw the handwriting; but never mind, Marian; he will probably think you are engaged to Fordyce.”

“Now, Judith, *do* you suppose he will?”

“Why, what do you care?”

I wanted to tell her I’d as lief he would think I had committed burglary; but it wouldn’t do to say so.

“And your father wouldn’t breathe a word?”

“No, Judith; don’t imagine it for a moment.”

“So nothing dreadful has happened, after all; and poor Silas will never be the wiser. O, Marian, I’m in such an exalted frame of mind, I feel prepared to do my duty all my life by that boy. You don’t know the self-sacrifice there is in true love.”

It was dreadful to see her so deluded; but the more I reasoned with her, the more she thought I was of the earth earthy, and “couldn’t appreciate such a peculiar case.”

She was so high up in the blue that she never stopped to care about Robert’s getting a wrong impression of me. I didn’t like it very well to have him suppose I was carrying on a private correspondence with Fordyce, after all I had said against him. Robert never mentioned his name to me, but he seemed very sober, and stopped getting our mail. I suppose he thought I was a deceitful, foolish girl, and he had just found me out. Perhaps some people wouldn’t have minded; but Robert has always been a firm friend of mine, and I think a great deal of his good opinion.

Affairs went on very quietly for a while. My father asked no questions. Keller knew nothing whatever, but spoke now and then of Silas, and darkly hinted that some girls were naturally fickle. Judith answered Fordyce's letter, bidding him stop writing, and he obeyed. But all the while, it seems, he was turning things over in his mind, and coming to the conclusion that he shouldn't wait till they went to the stars; he would rather be married on earth. So he took the matter into his own hands, and wrote Silas Hackett a very saucy letter. Silas was busy with his engineering, trying to please Judith, and thinking everything was right, when this letter came. It told him flatly that he was very much mistaken if he thought Judith Willard cared anything about him. The idea was preposterous. His nature was too grovelling for her. She only pitied him — poor fellow! while her heart was given to a far superior and more cultivated man; to wit, Fordyce Bailey, Esquire. If Silas Hackett, yeoman, knew what was best, he would take his unworthy self out of the way, and not annoy the dear girl any more.

This was a great surprise to Silas, but he was too sharp to be imposed upon. He wrote back to Mr. Bailey that he should wait till he heard from the lady herself before he took himself out of the way. Fordyce was not prepared to find the country boy so cool and dignified. Silas was more than a match for him, and sent his impudent letter to Judith, merely remarking that it must be either a joke or a foolish mistake; he had "all faith in her, and knew she would not deceive him."

His manly conduct shamed Judith.

"What shall I do?" said she. "Tell me *what* to do."

"Write him the whole truth," said I.

"But, Marian, he will despise me. He won't understand that I was sacrificing my feelings for his sake. I can't tell him. Don't you see I can't?"

My heart turned away from Judith for just one moment, with a feeling almost like disgust; and then I remembered what good friends we had always been, and how Robert had said if anybody had any influence over her, it was I; and I put my cheek close to hers, and spoke firmly, as if I was talking to a child.

"Don't you know, dear, I can see the thing just as it is, for my mind is clear, and yours isn't? You don't think what you are doing. There is nothing safe but the truth, Judith — the plain, square truth."

That brought her to her senses at last, for she means to be sincere, only she lacks courage. She could not bear to write Silas that Fordyce was correct; but she told him if he would come, she would "explain things to his satisfaction."

He came, and she explained; but I doubt if it was to his satisfaction, for he looked so distressed that everybody noticed it. Judith said not a word about breaking the engagement; but he told her she was free, and he never spoke a word of blame. She declares she never came so near loving him as she did when he told her she was free; he looked so noble, and his face was so pale and refined.

He went away, and everybody seemed to know at once how the case stood; and such a time as there

was all over town! for Quinnebasset people will talk. Robert was too proud to ask questions, but he seemed very much surprised.

Of course Judith, in her distress wrote to Fordyce, and he came straightway to see her; got out of the stage, and walked all the way from the post office, in a heavy rain-storm, on purpose to surprise her. I've heard before of people that didn't know enough to keep out of fire and water! Judith and I were standing in the front hall, and what think he said, as he nipped in, swinging his cane?

"Ah, Judith, when the *half-gods* go, the gods may arrive!"

That's Emerson, I wish you to know, and "half-gods" stands for Silas Hackett, and "gods" for Fordyce Bailey. I looked down at Fordyce's muddy boots, and thought,—

"Well, young man, you may call yourself a god, but you have *clay feet*."

I ran home, and left the lovers to themselves, rather glad at the bottom of my heart that matters were approaching a crisis. I hadn't been at home five minutes, and Benjie and I were having a cosy rock in the big chair, when Robert rushed in, looking both pleased and provoked, and shook hands with me in the heartiest manner, as if he would never let go.

"Well, you *are* pure gold, after all," said he, "as I always used to think; and I beg your pardon for taking up any other opinion."

"Thank you," said I. "Please explain."

"Why, I might have known better than to think you cared for that fool."

And then he set his teeth together, and said he,—

"But it cuts me up to find it's my own sister that's lacking in sense."

He did feel dreadfully. But it did me good to have him so cordial to me once more. He is none of your milk-and-water sort; and it pleased him so to find I hadn't deceived him, that it almost made up for his trouble about Judith. I come next to her, I do think, in his mind.

"Don't be hard on Judith," said I. "She couldn't help it. It's too bad; but she is really in earnest this time. You can see for yourself, Robert, she must be in love with that man, for if she wasn't, how could she endure him?"

That set him off in a gale of laughing, though I couldn't see what I had said so very absurd. If it doesn't take blind love to make some people endurable, then I'm mistaken.

"I like to hear you plead Judith's cause," said Robert, "your arguments are so original. But the trouble is with me, I am afraid your client doesn't know her own mind."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, I don't believe in being 'struck with huge love' all of a sudden. The real sort is something different—has a good solid foundation."

"That shows you don't know anything about it, sir."

"As much as you do, ma'am, begging your pardon. Do you suppose, now, Judith would ever have thought of this man with the bamboo cane if she hadn't been tired of Silas?"

"Why, Robert Willard! what an idea!"

"Well, I can't help my ideas. And, what's more, I

think she'll be dreadfully ashamed of this six months hence."

I shook my head.

"Wait and see," said he, looking as wise as an owl.

It isn't six months yet; so I can't say positively. She never thought of such a thing as a commonplace, matter-of-fact engagement with Fordyce Bailey, and it rather bewildered her at first. There didn't seem to be so much romance when she found everybody was willing. Aunt Esther liked it; her father said, "Just as you please;" and Robert only stood off and whistled. He had begged her to wait a year before she made any more promises to anybody; but she didn't mind him, and then he washed his hands of her.

She keeps asking me, "Don't I seem happy?" Well, yes, she does. Only no one has congratulated her on her new engagement, and she says she "suspects Fordyce isn't a great favorite in Quinnebasset." I could have told her that before.

"But what do you care?" said I. "You are satisfied with him, and that's enough."

He is editing a paper called the "Cynosura Star," and Judith fills one corner every week with a poem. The rest of the time she is writing letters to her dear Fordyce. Say what you will, Miss Tottenham, it must be delightful to be in love!

CHAPTER XXXV.

A QUEER LITTLE STORY.

 WOULDN'T be a doctor's wife for anything in this world," cried Marian, her swift-flying broom sending the cat skulking under the table.

"Why not?" said Judith, sitting down in the middle of the room to avoid the September gale from the open window.

"Why, a medical man hasn't any peace of his life, or his wife either. I had to keep breakfast hot two mortal hours this morning,—please move back your chair a little,—and what time my father'll get home to dinner nobody knows. I wouldn't marry a doctor if it was to save the world."

Marian spoke with unnecessary warmth, being secretly irritated by Judith's plastic manner of letting her skirts drag in the dirt.

"You wouldn't, indeed?" said Judith, with a sly smile. "I should think you were the last person to speak against the faculty. You've always been brought up with doctors, and you'll marry one yet. I'm as sure of it as I am that I sit in this chair."

Marian twitched back her sweeping cap, which had settled on the bridge of her nose, and took up the dust pan in high disdain.

"I know too much for that," said she; "a burnt child dreads the fire."

Judith laughed — a low, lady-like laugh, with an undertone of meaning in it.

"I'll tell that to Robert," said she.

Quick as thought, the bright color surged to Marian's face, over went the dust pan, and down she sank to the floor.

"Judith Willard, how could you?"

It was the first time the idea had ever entered her head of Robert as a possible lover.

Judith laughed again.

"How could you speak so?" said Marian, in a grieved tone. "I think it's really indelicate."

"Why, child, what did I say?"

True enough. What had she said? The words were nothing. How stupid to take them up as if they had some hidden meaning! The pink color in Marian's face deepened to crimson. It was really very awkward, and she was put to her woman's wits to know what to say next. Determined to steer clear of the medical profession this time, she dashed headlong into another subject.

"O, Jude, did you know Thankful had given me that recipe for making ginger tea?"

"Ah!"

"Yes, that famous ginger tea! Don't you know how private she used to be about it? You take two eggs —"

"Do I? Well, you're quick at changing the conversation!" said Judith, with an amused smile. "I don't see, though, and never did, why you should be so

afraid of me, Marian. I've always talked to you freely about my own affairs; but you're just as close-mouthed! I never dared hint a word about Robert before, and the moment I do it, you're on your dignity."

Marian looked up in utter astonishment.

"O, now, dear, you needn't pretend to such ignorance! You know all about it just as well as I do."

"All about what?"

"Why, that Robert worships the very ground you walk on."

It was all out now—the words Judith ought never to have spoken, the story she had no right to tell, the secret which Robert himself had never whispered to a living soul.

Marian turned pale, and looked frightened.

"I don't believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because Robert would know better."

Marian spoke with prompt decision, as if the idea was not to be entertained for a moment, and her tone piqued Judith.

"Now, Marian, that's a strange way to talk! If there's a living human being you think is perfection, next to your father, it's Robert Willard, and you can't deny it."

"Well, what of that? That isn't saying I'm in love with him; and I'm not, any more than those tongs, or those bellows, except as a friend," added Marian, growing incoherent in her eagerness to set Judith right.

"But you will," was the ungrammatical reply.

"Will what?—No, I won't; I mean I can't; and I wish you wouldn't say another word about it. I should

hate Robert if he should say such a thing to me! He musn't! He musn't!"

"He won't then; you needn't be afraid," said Judith, in a changed tone. "I'll tell him."

"Tell him?—No, no, no! that would be the worst of the whole. O, Judith, please do promise you won't."

But Judith, whose family pride had been touched, only gazed straight into the fire, without answering. She was generally as pliable as a ball of putty, but when she did set her face like a flint, woe betide you! Marian had twenty minds. She wanted to kneel and implore; she was ready to fly into a rage; but on the whole, didn't know but it was best to turn the whole thing into a laugh.

The laugh carried the day. Before she had time to beseech or to scold, Benjie rushed in with a rueful face, exclaiming,—

"Hillo, you Mamie, I've been busted out of my last marble!"

And between the reproof Marian had to administer for bad language, with the child's face cuddled in her neck, and the answer she had to give Tom the next moment about the new flower-stand, Judith slipped out of the house, and ran home. Marian did not fear that she was seriously offended, for Judith's temper was perfect; but she did almost fear that the thoughtless girl might talk with Robert as she had threatened.

"She can't do it, though, till he comes home from Philadelphia; and before that time I'll make her promise to keep still."

But Judith carefully avoided the subject, and Marian

had not the courage to allude to it again. She hardly ever spoke Robert's name; but, strange to say, that conversation with Judith kept fresh all the fall. She could repeat every word of it, and the more she tried to drive it out of her head, the more it came back again, and staid. It had not taken five seconds for Judith to tell that little story; but it took days and weeks for Marian to say it over and over again to herself—"He worships the very ground you walk on." I don't believe it! It isn't at all likely.

And then she reviewed his words and looks, as many of them as she could possibly remember,—even the very tones of his voice,—in order to satisfy herself whether it really *was* "at all likely" or not. Not that it was of any particular consequence, either; only she wanted to know. Sometimes she thought Judith must be right; then again it seemed "perfectly absurd;" so she felt obliged to go over the same ground day after day, beginning with, "How I wish I knew!" and leaving off at the place of beginning. The subject was rather fascinating, and grew more and more so.

How strange it would be if Robert had really cared for her all this time, and she had not known it! But then she was so blind! Girls were often blind. There was Judith, one of the wise ones in such matters, if anybody ever was; and even she didn't dream Silas Hackett loved her till he told her so. Perhaps girls were usually kept in the dark on purpose. What did Robert say about that very thing? Marian recalled the exact words,—

"Girls are coquettes naturally. It doesn't answer

to let them know their power: it makes little tyrants of them, Marian."

Perhaps that was the very reason why Robert had let concealment prey upon his damask cheek so long. He was afraid Marian might take a dislike to him, as Judith had done to Silas.

"And I suppose I should. O, no doubt of it; only," added she, hesitating, "I am so very different from Judith! I never *quite* understood why Silas annoyed her so."

"Because," mused Marian, as she set a patch into Benjie's jacket, "because, if anybody does truly choose you out of the whole world, I should think your heart would answer back. That is, if it's such a person as — O, dear, what am I thinking about? I'm making a button-hole stitch round this patch."

Marian seized her scissors, and picked away with a resolute scowl, as if the button-hole stitch were not at the root of the mischief, but she must pick out a thought that went deeper still.

Ah, but the thought wouldn't come!

Once upon a time, an unfortunate lady, named Mrs. Bluebeard, dropped a fatal gold key in the closet, and got a stain on it, which all the scouring in the world wouldn't rub off. There are other things which take just as indelible stains as gold keys. Judith, with those few careless words, had made an impression on her friend's mind which she could not now efface if she tried.

"O, Marian," said she, one morning, in a matter-of-course way, as if she were talking of basque patterns, "I wrote Robert yesterday what you said about hating

him if he should come any nearer; so you needn't be at all afraid: he is very quick to take a hint."

"Why, Judith Willard, you can't be in earnest. You didn't tell him that?"

"To be sure I did; and it's nothing to look so wild about, child. It's only between Robert and me. You may be sure 'twon't go any farther."

"O, Judith, Judith, I don't thank you; and I think, as I said before, you're positively indelicate," cried poor Marian, burying her blazing face in her hands.

"Why, Marian, do you suppose I'd let my darling brother go and make a fool of himself?"

"You needn't be afraid of that, Judith Willard. He's plenty big enough and old enough to take care of his own affairs. And to think of your interfering, and mortifying me to death!"

"I never thought of your taking it so to heart," said gentle Judith, a little disconcerted. "I'll write again to-morrow, and say it was all a mistake."

"If you do," cried Marian, springing up, and seizing Judith's hands, "if you do —"

"Well, there's no such thing as suiting you," returned Judith, with mild resignation. "If I were in your place, Marian, I wouldn't think any more about it: it will soon blow over."

"Wouldn't think any more about it!" Very good, very easily said; only, like the most of Judith's advice, it wasn't practical, and couldn't be followed. Marian thought more than ever. How could she help it? Thought till her young heart was sick with shame.

Robert — henceforth Dr. Willard — returned from

Philadelphia in November, and for the first time in her life she was afraid of him, and ran and hid every time she heard a footstep in the hall. She might have spared herself the pains, for Robert did not call. He was very much taken up with two or three old women, who had put themselves in his hands, and expected him to make them over as good as new.

"Seems to me Robert isn't very social," said Dr. Prescott, one night at the tea-table. "I have only seen him once, and that was on the street."

"I'd like some of the quince, if you please, papa."

"What! Not in your tea-cup, daughter!"

The tea-cup was withdrawn so suddenly that Benjie laughed, and swallowed a crumb the wrong way. Marian thought it the strangest thing that she should have been so absent-minded, when she was taking special pains to appear unconcerned. That miserable self-consciousness which came over her every time Robert's name was mentioned, what would it drive her into next?

"Father," said she, speaking very fast, "Mr. Bailey's new paper—the Cynosura Star—has stopped."

"Ah, I *thought* it was nothing more than a shooting star. I am not surprised."

"But it troubles Judith."

"Judith is always in trouble, and always will be till she goes out of herself, and throws her energies into a proper channel."

"But you don't want her husband to fail in business?"

"What husband? That Bailey? He isn't her

husband yet, and, never will be. It's too bad to be thought of."

"Papa, you're always so hard on Fordyce."

"Am I? I suppose I can't forget that he once refused to marry my daughter," said the doctor, glancing at the fair face opposite, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and behind the twinkle a very sincere look of admiration. If there was a brighter, bonnier, more winsome lassie alive than "my daughter Marian," he hadn't found it out.

"O, fie, father; he didn't mean to steal my heart. It was only an accident, and you ought to forgive him," said Marian, with a light laugh, which showed she was no longer sensitive on that point.

"So I ought, for he restored it to you like a gentleman."

A sudden cloud passed over Marian's face. She was thinking,—

"My father little knows, when he jokes about that, that I have done almost the same thing myself. Haven't I restored Robert Willard's heart to him—like a lady? And didn't wait till he offered it, either! Post-haste—no time wasted! I can seem to see that boy laugh in his sleeve. He must think I'm *so* obliging! Saved him all the trouble of speaking!"

"But I'll tell you the one I'm afraid I can't forgive," went on her father, in a playful mood; "and that is the man who really comes and steals that little heart, and isn't honest enough to bring it back again. That will cost me dear, you see. I'm glad he keeps away so long."

The doctor was only indulging in a little paternal gallantry. His words had no special meaning; why should Marian look so confused?

"I am glad he keeps away so long" had no allusion to Robert, as she very well knew when she came to think a moment.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

QUEER LITTLE STORY CONTINUED.

HY, Robert, is that you?" exclaimed Marian, entering the library with the feather duster in her hand. She must have been very much surprised to find him there, for as he came in at one door, she had run out at the other.

"How do you do?" said the new doctor, turning over a "book of bones," and forgetting to shake hands.

It was well he did not look up at once. He might have thought Marian was sick; but by the time he had come to the end of that very interesting paragraph, the bright color had crept back again to her cheeks.

"What do you hear from Keller?" said he, taking down another book.

"Ah!" thought Marian, with a little shiver, "he doesn't care whether I'm alive or dead. I was anxious to find out, and now I know."

"Keller? O, he entered college before you went away — didn't he? some time in September. He hardly limps at all; just lame enough, he writes, to escape hazing."

"There, that was a long sentence," thought she, throwing her head back with a feeling of relief, "and nothing out of the way in it, I'm sure."

"Glad to hear it," said Dr. Willard, putting back two books, and taking down another, while he thought in his turn,—

"How handsome Marian grows! But proud as Lucifer. She needn't toss her head in that style. Wants me to understand that she doesn't care any more for me than she does for 'those tongs.' Tongs was the word. Well, she may not find me as troublesome as she expects."

There was a little pause, during which Robert read a table of Latin weights and measures backward, and Marian dusted everything faithfully, from the dictionary to the door-knob.

"I wish Judith Willard had attended to her own affairs," groaned she, inwardly. "What shall I do to let Robert know I don't believe her story? He never cared the least thing about me, and now he'll go to hating me. Don't I know how I felt towards Fordyce Bailey? I declare it's a crying shame. But I can't say a word; it would be very improper, and of course he despises me too much to allude to the subject."

"Cool weather," said Robert, putting back the last book, and moving towards the door.

"Very," returned Marian, looking up with a glance that held him to the spot half a minute; it seemed to say so plainly, "Why do you go?"

"But I won't be a dunce," thought he, giving himself a mental shaking. "Good morning, Marian."

"O, Judith, Judith," thought Marian, rushing up to her chamber, and shutting herself in. "What have you done? You think no one has any troubles but

yourself; but *I* say it's a hard case to lose such a good friend as Robert, just for a piece of foolishness."

Meanwhile, Judith, absorbed in her own affairs, which did not run very smoothly, saw nothing of what was going on. She had saved Robert from making a fool of himself, and having done her duty, thought no more about it. She did not know what made him so quiet,—scarcely speaking unless asked a question,—and at the same time so restless, running from one thing to another, but presumed it was his worry about business. Dr. Prescott had made him a very tempting offer, and was really anxious to take him into partnership. There could hardly be a better opening for a young man, for Dr. Prescott ranked, to say the least, as the first physician in the county.

Still Robert held back. He wanted to think it over a while. Dr. Ephraim Ware, brother of the man who had been Mrs. Prescott's fellow-sufferer in Cuba, was about to retire from an excellent practice in the western part of the state, and proposed Dr. Willard's taking his place.

"It isn't best to settle for life in a hurry," said the young Esculapius, trying his best to weigh both these propositions carefully, and without the least reference to Marian.

"What would she care? It's lucky for me I found out her state of mind so early in the day, though I can't say I thank Judith for interfering. Marian probably considers me a moon-struck swain. I saw her lip curl when she spoke to me. Well, if I do decide to go into practice with her father, I guess I can contrive to keep out of her way! Thank goodness, there's a street door

to the office. She is the only girl in the world for me, and I always did have a hope that some time— And who knows but now, if Judith hadn't— But no! when it comes to comparing me to a pair of tongs, that settles the matter!"

So said Robert, and thought hope was dead, when it was only buried alive—buried under resolutions and impediments mountain high; but somehow there was always a loophole for air to steal in, and the faint little hope breathed the breath of life still.

When Marian heard through Judith, as they were walking home from church together, that Robert had at last decided to accept her father's offer, she merely said,—

"Has he?"

"O, Marian, isn't it so nice we can keep him at home?"

"See her," thought Marian, "walking this street perfectly serene, like an elephant that's trod upon a worm, and never noticed it! If she did but know, it's anything but nice for *me*, this keeping Robert at home!"

Certainly. Very trying, very mortifying; but in spite of that, and underneath it all, exquisitely delightful too! Why so? Marian did not stop to inquire. She knew she could not help being "rather glad," but supposed it was because Robert was rid of those Wares. She never liked the family, and she had been so afraid he would get mixed up with Dr. Ephraim. How it had troubled her! You see she always did want Robert to do well; she was proud of him; and then the time had been when they were such good friends. He and her father suited each other, and

ought to be together; it was a fine thing for them both.

"I shan't take any peace of my life, having a person in the house I can't look in the face; still, my father has too hard a time, and for his sake I'm glad."

Thus Marian's feelings were very much like the waters of the lake in the Land of Roses — half bitter, half sweet.

The sign over the office door was taken down, and a new one put up with Robert's name added. But Marian had more peace of her life than she had expected, which shows it is never best to borrow trouble. Robert, having resolved to convince her — and himself, too — that he was *not* a moon-struck swain, devoted his whole soul to his profession, and many a day passed that she did not see him at all. She began to wish he would bring the evening mail, for then she should be sure of a peep at his face once a day. It was so odd not to have him running in, and she was always thinking of little things she wanted to say; but of course he wouldn't bring the mail, since that fuss with Fordyce's letter, unless specially requested. And who was going to request him? Not Marian! If he chose to keep himself at arm's length, let him do it; she had no idea of coaxing and wheedling anybody that disliked her so.

The winter was not half as pleasant as usual. Both these proud souls were smoothly polite; but every ice-cold "How do you do?" was spoken farther and farther off, till there was every prospect that they would soon be bowing to each other from the north and south poles.

"Robert believes me even more than I expected," Dr.

Prescott often remarked, as he leaned back to enjoy his newspaper; he was seldom called out now in the evening. "I did hope my oldest son would be the one to take my place, but next to him I should certainly choose Robert."

"Keller taught a capital school last winter," said Marian, who always found something else to talk about when Robert's name was mentioned.

"Yes, and if he proves as good at law as he is at teaching, I've no fault to find. I consider myself rarely blessed in all my children. To be sure my oldest daughter did run away from home, but my second one has been faithful thus far, and expects to spend her days with me."

"Yes, indeed, you may be sure of that, papa."

"There, that will do. I don't ask for any promises. Poor little girl! I was afraid the care might be too heavy for your tender shoulders; but, bless us, you have such a buoyant way with you, child! Why, you soar above your petty trials, up, up, and singing like the skylark. Do you know it?"

"I know you say so, father."

But as Marian drew the darning needle through Benjie's gray sock, she said to herself,—

"I sometimes think people are a little too sure about what goes on in other people's minds. He doesn't know I was out of patience with life not two hours ago, and asking, 'Is this all there is to it?'"

"And, my daughter, I count you very fortunate, after all, to have had your time so filled with ministering to others. Look at Judith! What has she had to think of but herself? Idleness isn't so bad for common-

place people, but those of the poetical temperament, like you and her, need employment — must have it."

"Have I the poetical temperament, father? I can't rhyme decently."

"You know what I mean. You are both of you sensitive and imaginative, prone to expect too much in life. Let such people float along with no aim or object, and no particular call on their energies, and — especially if they haven't sound health to begin with — they grow morbid, exaggerate their trials, and 'the deep poetic heart' becomes a lump of anguish in their breasts. What's the matter with Judith now? Remorse about Silas, I hope! Better late than never."

"Not that exactly, papa."

"I see you hesitate, dear. I had no right to ask you."

"O, yes, sir, you had; and it will do no harm to tell you. She has not heard from Mr. Bailey since last October, nearly six months ago. Isn't that enough to make anybody look sober?"

"Depends upon circumstances. It wouldn't distort *my* countenance — not in the least!"

At that moment there was a quick peal of the office-bell, so abrupt and decisive that it brought Marian and her father both to their feet.

"The young doctor," gasped a little boy, who had evidently run himself out of breath — "the young doctor — just alive — quick as you can go."

"What has happened to him? Where is he?"

"Don't know — down to my house. They didn't say — fell off his horse. Broke his neck, I guess."

At these terrible words, Marian sank deathly white

upon the sofa. Dr. Prescott, without looking at her, or asking another question, seized his hat, and ran. Marian, who had not uttered one word, caught the messenger, Hen Page, by the arms, and pulled him down to her. The little fellow, frightened at sight of her white lips moving, while no words came, screamed out to reassure her,—

“He’s alive yet. They told me to say he’s alive.”

“Who’s alive?” asked a manly voice, ringing clear and loud in the hall; and behold Robert himself, safe and sound, walking into the office! At the same moment, to his intense surprise, the cool-mannered Marian sprang up with a glad cry, and threw both arms round his neck.

“You see she thought you’s dead,” exclaimed the wonder-eyed little boy. “I told her you wasn’t,—not quite,—and she’s been gripping hold of me ever since, and trying to holler.”

“Why, Marian, I was just walking along from the post-office. What does this mean? Bless your little heart, Marian, don’t tremble so.”

Her arms had been suddenly withdrawn from his neck, and she was laughing and crying at once.

“Thought I was dead—did she? And she cared as much as this?”

Robert looked as if he was quite willing to be victim of a false report, under such circumstances.

“What *did* I say? What *was* I saying?” sobbed the poor mortified girl, speaking at last, and wrenching her hands from Robert’s grasp. “You *naughty* little Hen Page! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“D’you s’pose I went and did it a purpose?” re-

turned Hen, standing on his dignity. "They sent me liggitly split."

"Do you wonder it frightened me, Robert? He said you'd fallen off your horse, and broken your neck, and my father ran for dear life. Do you *wonder* it frightened me, Robert?"

"No, not at all; it was the most natural thing in the world," replied the young doctor, meekly; and his spirits sank as he spoke. "But do lie down, dear; you're as pale as a ghost."

Marian curled herself into a heap of mortified pride on the sofa.

"I should have done the same, and felt exactly as bad, Robert Willard, if it had been your old horse that had broken his neck," sobbed she.

That was a little too absurd. Even Hen Page tittered, and a sly twinkle came into Robert's eyes. A vase stood on the table, which she had filled with flowers that morning. He seized it, and scattered its contents right and left.

"Don't try to talk," said he, bending over her, and sprinkling her face with a geranium leaf. He did not like to hear her tell wrong stories, I suppose. She closed her eyes in desperation, conscious that all she said and did only made matters worse.

"Look here, doctor," said the little boy, watching the man with broken bones, kneeling so pliantly before his fair patient, "didn't you get hurt *anywhere*? What for pity sakes d'they mean?"

No reply. Dr. Willard was fully absorbed in waiting for the opening of a pair of wilful blue-gray eyes. He had not had a fair sight at them for half a year at

least, and now they were completely cornered, and the little story they had been hiding he was determined to get at, let it read as it might.

The situation was growing embarrassing. Marian could not pretend any longer to feel faint, for her face was rosy red, but open her eyes she would not. She must have known from the little remarks Robert made in a low tone, that he was not at all offended; indeed, quite the reverse; and there was nothing to be afraid of, nothing in the world but those keen brown orbs,—the very “remarkable” ones,—which she felt were looking straight down into her soul.

That little boy ought to have gone away then. It was clear even to his ten-years-old vision that “Benjie’s sister and the young doctor liked each other first rate,” as he afterwards reported; but being of an inquiring mind, he still lingered.

A happy thought came to Robert.

“Ah, ha, Hen, what day of the month is it?”

“An April fool, by George!” burst forth the little fellow; and he tore out of the office, swinging his cap. He had been making wee jokes all day, but such a stupendous one as this was quite beyond him.

“I’ll bet I know who started it,” said he; for nobody but his big brother, “Pickéd Evil,” would ever have presumed to trifle so with Dr. Prescott.

A wicked, impertinent trick; but neither Robert nor Marian felt proper indignation towards Pickéd Evil. If they were April fools, they liked their folly, and thought it better than the wisdom of Solomon. Robert was within an inch of quoting poetry, which showed he was certainly light-headed.



MISS O'NEIL WALKS INTO THE ROOM. Page 325.

“ And then she looked down on me
With a look that placed a crown on me.”

For Marian had opened her eyes at last, and fastened them on his coat-collar. But at this interesting juncture Miss O’Neil walked into the room.

“ Of all things!” exclaimed she, taking in the situation at a glance. “ The wind bloweth and it listeth; but I must say I’m surprised this time. I never allowed gentlemen to kneel to me, Miriam Linscott. Judge Dillingham did it once at a picnic, and I got him up as quick as I could; but he ground an awful grass stain into the knees of his white trousers.”

Marian was sitting bolt upright now, and Robert beside her, laughing heartily.

“ Hullo here!” shouted Benjie, bustling in with great pretended excitement; “ d’you know Mr. Liscom’d fallen off his horse and broke his neck?”

“ That joke is worn pretty thin, my boy,” returned Robert.

But it took immediate effect on Miss O’Neil.

“ You don’t say so! Poor Phebe Liscom! Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion! How strange it is that of all Hiram’s three wives, she should be the *only* one left to see him buried!”

Robert laughed in the most heartless manner, thinking what a lonesome funeral it would be with *only* one widow for mourner, and did not attempt to stop Miss O’Neil, who hurried to the scene of the tragedy, followed by young Benjie, with his handkerchief stuffed in his mouth.

Five minutes later Dr. Prescott returned, fuming with honest indignation against Pickéd Evil and all his clan.

Dr. Willard and Marian were talking too fast to hear the sound of his footsteps. And, as they happened to be looking straight at each other, they very naturally did not see him as he paused on the threshold.

"Well, well," thought he, turning on his heel with "a slow, wise smile," "I don't appear to be wanted here."

By which he must have meant that his daughter was in good hands. When he left her he had feared a case of hysterics; but his partner certainly knew enough to manage that! It was from no doubt of the young doctor's professional skill that the old doctor walked out of the house with a face almost tearful. No; it was the new look in Marian's eyes which had touched him so,—the soulful, trusting look, like her dear lost mother. He was not displeased by the sudden turn of affairs, and, if not very much surprised either, that only shows his native shrewdness of mind.

"I could not have asked better for our daughter," said he. "Helen herself would be satisfied. I believe the children were designed for each other; and it is no light fancy, but a love that will outlast time."

Still the lonely man could not help feeling saddened. Marian was all he had left to make sunshine for him, and without her his home would be desolate. He had hoped to keep her with him several years longer, for, according to his theory, no woman should be married under twenty-five.

"To a father waxing old,
Nothing is dearer than a daughter,"

thought he. "But she shall never know how much it costs me to give her up."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE END.

Miss Tottenham.

SEPTEMBER 3.



WENTY to-day. I wrote you fifteen pages full of sentiment, Miss Tottenham, a year and a half ago, or thereabouts, before I had settled down to my new happiness, and could take it reasonably; but, though everything I said was only the truth, it sounded so *flimsy* that I had to cut it out. There are some things too precious to be talked about, and I do wonder how people can parade them before the world. I can't speak of them even to Judith.

She says I needn't talk of her being fickle, for didn't I declare I wouldn't marry a doctor, and then go and accept the first medical man that proposed? "Worse than that," said I; "for he didn't propose; he only gave me a conundrum about a pair of tongs. Solemnly, Judith, I never had an offer in my life."

She laughed, but I suspect she doubts the depth of my feeling because I won't talk seriously. Why, Miss Tottenham, it's too sweet, it's too sacred, to bear any discussion.

We are to be married next Christmas. O, if mother were only here to see me write the words! And I

think she is, for I feel to-night just as I used to when I sat on the low ottoman with my head in her lap. I have done what I know she would like: I have arranged to live here at home with my father and Benjie. I told Robert he was worth marrying, but he wasn't worth leaving home for, and I *must* stay and take care of mother's "legacy." I was very decided; but it didn't cost me much, for he loves my father dearly, and thinks just as I do about it.

I assure you, Miss Tottenham, I shall never forget how pleased my father looked when we told him our plan. He had been trying so hard to make believe he was willing to give me up; but when he found I wouldn't be given up, he put both arms round me and blessed me. I turned to Robert, and told him that just finished my joy for this world!

I must not forget to speak of Judith. It was rather hard for her when Fordyce married that rich young widow of Lynn; but she is glad of it now, and smiles at her past foolishness, which she says would never have reached such a climax if she had had work enough to do to keep her out of mischief. She seems like another person since aunt Esther went away. But you don't know about that.

Aunt Esther's husband returned from California; there was a reconciliation, and he took her back with him. Then Robert thought Tid was having too hard a time, and sent her to boarding-school, and Judith has had charge of the family ever since; for, though Brooksey Waters does the hard work, she needs looking after, and to be told when to put on the potatoes,

as much as a small child. Judith has waked up wonderfully. She said to me the other day,—

“I slept, and dreamed that life was beauty;
I woke, and found that life was duty.”

I am so glad she sees things differently! She writes poetry still, but only when she has a good right to the time. She says she shall never be married. Of course I pay no attention to that, and hope it won’t come true. Still, there *would* be a risk in it; for how can she ever be sure it’s the right man? And, as dear aunt Filura says, “A sensible woman is sure to be happy single; but marriage is very uncertain business.”

Uncertain? Not for me. It may be for those who can’t marry Robert! But with him at my side, and my heavenly Father above me, how can I be afraid?

December 23. It will be a very quiet wedding. Pauline has arranged everything; so you may know it’s just right. Only I would have Miss O’Neil and Thankful Works, because I pity them so. Pauline had to lend Thankful her gray ladies’ cloth dress to make her respectable. I guess that poor creature finds there are some things harder than getting up in the night to hurrah for McClellan.

I am glad Silas Hackett is in Chicago; though it is quite absurd what Keller says about Judith.

“She doesn’t care for things till they are out of her reach. You know ‘there is no cream like that which rises on spilled milk.’”

Naughty boy! He is to be Robert’s groomsman, and I wanted Judith for bridesmaid; but it is to be Marie Smith; if you can’t guess why, no matter.

There is Benjie thumping at the door. He seems to

think I am going to be hung, and he won't lose sight of me if he can help it.

And now, good by, Miss Tottenham. I salute your cheek. You are sure to keep your lips shut; for, see, I put you in a big envelope, and paste you down with mucilage. Good by, discreet old friend, good by!

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